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**COMMENTARY**

**DARBY'S SYNOPSIS OF THE  
BOOKS OF THE BIBLE  
PART 2: NEW TESTAMENT**

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## John Nelson Darby, 1800-1882

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# THE NEW TESTAMENT

## INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPELS

The Gospels, in general, develop these characters of Christ, not in a dogmatic manner (that of John alone having to a certain degree that form), but by so relating the history of the Lord as to present Him in these different characters, in a much more living way than if it were only set before us in doctrine. The Lord speaks according to such or such a character; He acts in the one or in the other; so that we see Him Himself accomplishing that which belonged to the different positions that we know to be His according to scripture.

Thus, not only is the character much better known in its moral details, according to its true scriptural import, as well as the meaning and purpose of God therein revealed, but Christ Himself becomes in these characters more personally the object of faith and of the heart's affections. It is a Person whom we know, and not merely a doctrine. By this precious means which God had deigned to use, truths with respect to Jesus are much more connected with all that went before, with the Old Testament history. The change in God's dealings is linked with the glory of the Person of Christ, in connection with which this transition from God's relations with Israel and the world to the heavenly and christian order took place. This heavenly system, while possessing a character more entirely distinct from Judaism than would have been the case if the Lord had not come, is not a doctrine that nullifies, by contradicting, that which preceded it. When Christ came, He presented Himself to the Jews as on the one hand subject to the law, and on the other as the Seed in whom the promises were to be fulfilled. He was rejected; so that this people, not only had broken the law, which they had done from Sinai on,\* but forfeited all right to the promises, and promises without condition always distinguished (see Romans 10). God could then bring in the fullness of His grace. At the same time the types the figures, had their accomplishment; the curse of the law was executed; the prophecies that related to the humiliation of Christ were fulfilled; and the relations of all souls with God — always necessarily attached to His Person, when once He had appeared — were connected with the position taken by the Redeemer in heaven. Thence the door was opened to the Gentiles, and the purpose of God with respect to the assembly, the body

of the ascended Christ, fully revealed. Son of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power by resurrection from the dead, He was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy. He was the firstborn from the dead, the head of His body the assembly, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence.

[\* It is solemn but instructive to remark that in everything God has set up, the first thing man has done has been to ruin it. Man himself first of all. Then Noah, the new head of the world, he got drunk. Then the golden calf when the law was given, the priesthood offering strange fire the first day. Solomon turning to idolatry and ruining the kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar making the golden image and persecuting the servants of the true God. God went on in grace, but the system was fallen. So I doubt not with the church. All will be made good more gloriously in the second Adam.]

The glory of the new order of things was so much the more excellent, so much the more exalted above all the earthly order that had preceded it, that it was attached to the Person of the Lord Himself, and to Him as man glorified in the presence of God His Father. And at the same time, that which took place puts its seal upon all that had preceded it, as having had its true place, and having been ordained of God; for the Lord presented Himself on earth in connection with the system that existed before He came.

The first three Gospels give to us the presentation of Christ to responsible man, and especially to Israel. John presents to us the divine and eternal character of the Lord Himself, Israel from chapter I being viewed as having rejected Him, and themselves hardened and rejected, and the world as insensible to the presence of its Creator; hence effectual and sovereign grace, and being born again, and the cross as the foundation of heavenly things, come fully out in this Gospel.

## MATTHEW

Let us now consider the Gospel by Matthew. This Gospel sets Christ before us in the character of the Son of David and of Abraham, that is to say, in connection with the promises made to Israel, but presents Him withal as Emmanuel, Jehovah the Savior, for such the Christ was. It is He who, being received, should have accomplished the promises (and hereafter He will do so) in favor of this beloved people. This Gospel is in fact the history of His rejection by the people, and consequently that of the condemnation of the people themselves, so far as their responsibility was concerned (for the counsels of God cannot fail), and the substitution of that which God was going to bring in according to His purpose.

In proportion as the character of the King and of the kingdom develops itself, and arouses the attention of the leaders of the people, they oppose it, and deprive themselves, as well as the people who follow them, of all the blessings connected with the presence of the Messiah. The Lord declares to them the consequences of this, and shows His disciples the position of the kingdom which should be set up on the earth after His rejection, and also the glories which should result from it to Himself and to His people with Him. And in His Person, and as regards His work, the foundation of the assembly also is revealed the church as built by Himself. In a word, consequent on His rejection by Israel, first the kingdom as it exists now is revealed (chap. 13), then the church (chap. 16), and then the kingdom in the glory (chap. 17).

At length, after His resurrection, a new commission, addressed to all nations, is given to the apostles sent out by Jesus as risen.\*

[\* This was from resurrection in Galilee; not from heaven and glory, that was near Damascus.]

The object of the Spirit of God, in this Gospel, being to present Jehovah as fulfilling the promises made to Israel, and the prophecies that relate to the Messiah (and no one can fail to be struck with the number of references to their fulfillment), He commences with the genealogy of the Lord, starting from David and Abraham, the two stocks from which the

Messianic genealogy sprang, and to which the promises had been made. The genealogy is divided into three periods, conformably to three great divisions of the history of the people: from Abraham to the establishment of royalty, in the person of David; from the establishment of royalty to the captivity; and from the captivity to Jesus.

We may observe that the Holy Ghost mentions, in this genealogy, the grievous sins committed by the persons whose names are given, magnifying the sovereign grace of God who could bestow a Savior in connection with such sins as those of Judah, with a poor Moabitess brought in amidst His people, and with crimes like those of David.

It is the legal genealogy which is given here, that is to say, the genealogy of Joseph, of whom Christ was the rightful heir according to Jewish law. The evangelist has omitted three kings of the parentage of Ahab, in order to have the fourteen generations in each period. Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim are also omitted. The object of the genealogy is not at all affected by this circumstance. The point was to give it as recognized by the Jews, and all the kings were well known to all.

The evangelist briefly relates the facts concerning the birth of Jesus, facts which are of infinite and eternal importance, not only to the Jews, who were immediately interested in them, but to ourselves facts in which God has deigned to link His own glory with our interests, with man.

Mary was betrothed to Joseph. Her posterity was consequently legally that of Joseph, as to the rights of inheritance; but the child she carried in her womb was of divine origin, conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost. The angel of Jehovah is sent, as the instrument of providence, to satisfy the tender conscience and upright heart of Joseph, by communicating to him that that which Mary had conceived was of the Holy Ghost.

We may remark here, that the angel on this occasion addresses Joseph as "son of David." The Holy Ghost thus draws our attention to the relationship of Joseph (the reputed father of Jesus) to David, Mary being called his wife. The angel gives at the same time the name of Jesus (that is, Jehovah the Savior) to the child that should be born. He applies this name to the deliverance of Israel from the condition into which sin had plunged

them.\* All these circumstances happened, in order to fulfill that which Jehovah had said by the mouth of His prophet, “Behold a the] virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”

[\* It is written, “For he shall save his people,” thus plainly showing the title of Jehovah contained in the word Jesus or Jehoshua. For Israel was the people of the Lord, that is, of Jehovah.]

Here then is that which the Spirit of God sets before us in these few verses: Jesus, the Son of David, conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost; Jehovah, the Savior, who delivers Israel from their sins; God with them; He who accomplished those marvelous prophecies which, more or less plainly, drew the outline that the Lord Jesus alone could fill up.

Joseph, a just man, simple in heart and obedient, discerns without difficulty the revelation of the Lord, and obeys it.

These titles stamp the character of this Gospel, that is, of the way Christ is presented in it. And how wonderful this revelation of Him by whom the words and promises of Jehovah were to be fulfilled! What a groundwork of truth for the understanding of what this glorious and mysterious Person was, of whom the Old Testament had said enough to awaken the desires and to confound the minds of the people to whom He was given!

Born of a woman, born under the law, heir to all the rights of David according to the flesh, also the Son of God, Jehovah the Savior, God with His people: who could comprehend or fathom the mystery of His nature in whom all these things were combined? His life in fact, as we shall see, displays the obedience of the perfect man, the perfections and the power of God.

The titles which we have just named, and which we read in chapter 1:20-23, are connected with His glory in the midst of Israel — that is to say, the heir of David, Jesus the Savior of His people, and Emmanuel. His birth of the Holy Ghost accomplished Psalm 2:7 with regard to Him as a man born on the earth. The name of Jesus, and His conception by the power of the Holy Ghost, no doubt go beyond this relationship, but are linked also in an especial manner with His position in Israel.\*



- [\* The wider relationship is more distinctively given in the Gospel of Luke, where His genealogy is traced up to Adam; but here the title of Son of man is specially appropriate.]

**CHAPTER 2.** Thus born, thus characterised by the angel and fulfilling the prophecies that announced the presence of Emmanuel, He is formally acknowledged King of the Jews by the Gentiles, who are guided by the will of God acting on the hearts of their wise men.\* That is to say, we find the Lord, Emmanuel, the Son of David, Jehovah the Savior, the Son of God, born King of the Jews, recognised by the heads of the Gentiles. This is the testimony of God in Matthew's Gospel, and the character in which Jesus is there presented. Afterwards, in the presence of Jesus thus revealed, we see the leaders of the Jews in connection with a foreign king, knowing however as a system the revelations of God in His word, but wholly indifferent to Him who was their object; and this king, the fierce enemy of the Lord, the true King and Messiah, seeking to put Him to death.

- [\* The star does not lead the wise men from their own country to Judea. It pleased God to present this testimony to Herod and to the leaders of the people. Having been directed by the word (the meaning of which was declared by the chief priests and scribes themselves, and according to which Herod sent them to Bethlehem), they again see the star which they had seen in their own country, which conducts them to the house. Their visit also took place some time after the birth of Jesus. No doubt they first saw the star at the time of His birth. Herod makes his calculations according to the moment of the star's appearance, which he had carefully ascertained from the lips of the wise men. Their journey must have occupied some time. The birth of Jesus is related in chapter 1. The first verse of chapter 2 should be read, Now Jesus having been born"; it speaks of a time already past. I would also remark here that the Old Testament prophecies are quoted in three ways, which must not be confounded: "that it might be fulfilled", "so that it was fulfilled"; and, "then was fulfilled." In the first case it is the object of the prophecy; Matthew 1:22, 23 is an instance. In the second it is an accomplishment contained in the scope of the prophecy, but not the sole and complete thought of the Holy Ghost; Matthew 2:23 may serve as an example. In the third it is simply a fact which corresponds with the quotation, which in its spirit applies to it, without being its positive object — chapter 2:17, for instance I am not aware that the first two are distinguished in our English translation. Where the sense may require it, I shall hope to point out the difference.]

The providence of God watches over the child born unto Israel, employing means that leave the responsibility of the nation its full place; and that accomplish at the same time all the intentions of God with regard to this

only true remnant of Israel, this only true source of hope for the people. For, out of Him, all would fall and suffer the consequences of being connected with the people.

Gone down into Egypt to avoid the cruel design of Herod to take away His life, He becomes the true Branch; He recommences (that is, morally) the history of Israel in His own Person, as well as (in a wider sense) the history of man as the second Adam in relation with God: only that for this His death must come in — for all, no doubt, for blessing. But He was Son of God and Messiah, Son of David then. But to take His own place as Son of man He must die (see John 12). It is not only the prophecy of Hosea, “out of Egypt have I called my Son, which thus applies to this true beginning of Israel in grace (as the beloved of God), and according to His counsels (the people having entirely failed, so that without this, God must have cut them off). We have seen, in Isaiah, Israel the servant giving place to Christ the Servant, who gathers a faithful remnant (the children whom God has given Him while He hides His face from the house of Jacob), that become the nucleus of the new nation of Israel according to God. Chapter 49 of that prophet gives this transition from Israel to Christ in a striking manner. Moreover this is the basis of all the history of Israel, looked at as having failed under the law, and being re-established in grace. Christ is morally the new stock from which they spring (compare Isaiah 49:3, 5).\*

[\* In verse 5 Christ assumes this title of Servant. The same substitution of Christ for Israel is found in John 15. Israel had been the vine brought out of Egypt. Christ is the true Vine.]

Herod being dead, God makes it known to Joseph, in a dream, commanding him to return, with the young child and its mother, into the land of Israel. We should remark, that the land is here mentioned by the name that recalls the privileges bestowed by God. It is neither Judea nor Galilee; it is “the land of Israel.” But can the Son of David, in entering it, approach the throne of His fathers? No: He must take the place of a stranger among the despised of His people. Directed by God in a dream, Joseph carries Him into Galilee, whose inhabitants were objects of sovereign contempt to the Jews, as not being in habitual connection with Jerusalem and Judea, the land of David, of the kings acknowledged by God, and of the temple, and where even the dialect of the language common to both betrayed their

practical separation from that part of the nation which, by the favor of God, had returned to Judea from Babylon.

Even in Galilee Joseph establishes himself in a place, the very name of which was a reproach to one who dwelt there, and a blot on his reputation.

Such was the position of the Son of God when He came into this world, and such the relationship of the Son of David with His people, when, by grace and according to the counsels of God, He stood amongst them. On the one hand, Emmanuel, Jehovah their Savior, on the other, the Son of David; but, while taking His place among His people, associated with the poorest and most despised of the flock, sheltered in Galilee from the iniquity of a false king, who, by help of the Gentiles of the fourth monarchy, was reigning over Judea, and with whom the priests and rulers of the people were in connection; the latter, unfaithful to God and dissatisfied with men, proudly detesting a yoke which their sins had brought upon them, and which they dared not shake off, although they were not sufficiently sensible of their sins to submit to it as the just infliction of God. Thus is it that the Messiah is presented to us by this evangelist, or rather by the Holy Ghost, in connection with Israel.

We now begin (chap. 3) His actual history. John the Baptist comes to prepare the way of Jehovah before Him, according to the prophecy of Isaiah; proclaiming that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and calling on the people to repent. It is by these three things that John's ministry to Israel is characterised in this Gospel. First the Lord Jehovah Himself was coming. The Holy Ghost leaves out the words "for our God," at the end of the verse, because Jesus comes as man in humiliation, although acknowledged at the same time to be Jehovah, and Israel could not be thus owned as entitled to say "our." In the second place the kingdom of heaven\* was at hand — that new dispensation which was to take the place of the one which, properly speaking, belonged to Sinai, where the Lord had spoken on the earth. In this new dispensation "the heavens should reign." They should be the source of, and characterise, God's authority in His Christ. Thirdly, the people, instead of being blessed in their present condition, were called to repentance in view of the approach of this kingdom. John therefore takes his place in the wilderness, departing from the Jews, with whom he could not associate himself because he came in the

way of righteousness (chap. 21:32). His food is that which he finds in the wilderness (even his prophetic garments bearing witness to the position which he had taken on the part of God), himself filled with the Holy Ghost.

- [\* This expression is found only in Matthew, as specially occupied with dispensations, and the dealings of God with the Jews. "The kingdom of God" is the generic term. "The kingdom of heaven" is the kingdom of God, but the kingdom of God as specially taking this character of heavenly government; we shall find it (farther on) separated into the kingdom of our Father, and the kingdom of the Son of man.]

Thus was he a prophet, for he came from God, and addressed himself to the people of God to call them to repentance, and he proclaimed the blessing of God according to the promises of Jehovah their God; but he was more than a prophet, for he declared as an immediate thing the introduction of a new dispensation, long expected, and the advent of the Lord in Person. At the same time, although coming to Israel, he did not own the people, for they were to be judged; the threshing-floor of Jehovah was to be cleansed, the trees that did not bear good fruit to be cut down. It would be a remnant only that Jehovah would place in the new position in the kingdom that he announced, without its being yet revealed in what manner it was to be established. He proclaimed the judgment of the people.

What a fact of immeasurable greatness was the presence of the Lord God in the midst of His people, in the Person of Him who, although He was doubtless to be the fulfillment of all the promises, was necessarily, though rejected, the Judge of all the evil existing among His people!

And the more we give these passages their true application, that is to say, the more we apply them to Israel, the more we apprehend their real force.\*

- [\* And we must remember that, besides the special promises to, and calling, of Israel as God's earthly people, that people were just man viewed in his responsibility to God under the fullest culture that God could give him. Up to the flood there was testimony but no dispensational dealings, or institutions of God. After it, in the new world, human government, calling and promise in Abraham, law, Messiah, God come in grace, everything God could do, and that in perfect patience, was done, and in vain as to good in flesh; and now Israel was being set aside as in the flesh, and the flesh judged, the fig-tree cursed as fruitless, and God's man, the second Adam, He in whom blessing was by redemption, introduced into the world. In the first three Gospels, as we have seen, we have Christ presented to man to be

received; in John, man is set aside and Israel, and God's sovereign ways in grace and resurrection brought in.]

No doubt repentance is an eternal necessity to every soul that approaches God; but what a light is thrown upon this truth, when we see the intervention of the Lord Himself who calls His people to this repentance, setting aside — on their refusal — the whole system of their relationships with Him, and establishing a new dispensation — a kingdom which only belongs to those who hear Him — and causing at length His judgment to break forth against His people and the city which He had so long cherished! “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.” This truth gives room for the exhibition of another and most highly important one, announced here in connection with the sovereign rights of God rather than in its consequences, but which already contained in itself all those consequences. The people from all parts, and as we learn elsewhere especially the ungodly and despised, went out to be baptised, confessing their sins. But those who, in their own eyes, held the chief place among the people, were in the eyes of the prophet who loved the people according to God, the objects of the judgment he announced. Wrath was impending. Who had warned these scornful men to flee from it? Let them humble themselves like the rest; let them take their true place, and prove their change of heart. To boast in the privileges of their nation, or of their fathers, availed nothing before God. He required that which His very nature, His truth, demanded. Moreover He was sovereign; He was able of those stones to raise up children to Abraham. This is what His sovereign grace has done, through Christ, with regard to the Gentiles. There was reality needed. The axe was at the root of the trees, and those that did not bring forth good fruit should be cut down. This is the great moral principle which the judgment was going to put in force. The blow was not yet struck, but the axe was already at the root of the trees. John was come to bring those who received his testimony into a new position, or at least into a new state in which they were prepared for it. On their repentance he would distinguish them from the rest by baptism. But He who was coming after John — He whose shoes John was not worthy to bear — would thoroughly purge His floor, would separate those that were truly His, morally His, from among His people Israel (that was His floor), and would

execute judgment on the rest. John on his part opened the door to repentance beforehand; afterwards should come the judgment.

Judgment was not the only work that belonged to Jesus. Two things are however attributed to Him in John's testimony He baptises with fire — this is the judgment proclaimed in verse 12, which consumes all that is evil. But He baptises also with the Holy Ghost — that Spirit which, given to, and acting in divine energy in man, quickened, redeemed, cleansed in the blood of Christ, brings him out from the influence of all that acts on the flesh, and sets him in connection and in communion with all that is revealed of God, with the glory into which He brings His creatures in the life which He imparts, destroying morally in us the power of all that is contrary to the enjoyment of these privileges.

Observe here, that the only good fruit recognised by John, as the way of escape, is the sincere confession, through grace, of sin. Those only who make this confession escape the axe. There were really no good trees excepting those which confessed that they were bad.

But what a solemn moment was this for the people beloved of God! What an event was the presence of Jehovah in the midst of the nation with whom He stood in relationship!

Observe that John the Baptist does not here present the Messiah as the Savior come in grace, but as the Head of the kingdom, as Jehovah, who would execute judgment if the people did not repent. We shall see afterwards the position which He took in grace.

In verse 13 Jesus Himself, who until now has been presented as the Messiah and even as Jehovah, comes to John to be baptised with the baptism of repentance. We must remember that to come to this baptism was the only good fruit which a Jew, in his then condition, could produce. The act proved itself to be the fruit of a work of God — of the effectual work of the Holy Ghost. He who repents confesses that he has previously walked afar from God; so that it is a new movement, the fruit of God's word and work in him, the sign of a new life, of the life of the Spirit in his soul. By the very fact of John's mission, there was no other fruit, no other admissible proof, of life from God, in a Jew. We are not to infer from this, that there were none in whom the Spirit already acted vitally; but, in this

condition of the people and according to the call of God by His servant, that was the proof of this life — of the turning of the heart to God. These were the true remnant of the people, those whom God acknowledged as such; and it was thus they were separated from the mass who were ripening for judgment. These were the true saints — the excellent of the earth; although the self-abasement of repentance could be their only true place. It was there they must begin. When God brings in mercy and justice, they avail themselves thankfully of the former, confessing it to be their only resource, and they bow their heart before the latter, as the just consequence of the condition of God's people, but as applying it to themselves.

Now Jesus presents Himself in the midst of those who do this. Although truly the Lord, Jehovah, the righteous Judge of His people, He who was to purge His floor, He nevertheless takes His place among the faithful remnant who humble themselves before this judgment. He takes the place of the lowest of His people before God; as in Psalm 16 He calls Jehovah His Lord, saying unto Him, "My goodness extendeth not to Thee"; and says to the saints, and the excellent in the earth, "all my delight is in them." Perfect testimony of grace — the Savior identifying Himself, according to this grace, with the first movement of the Spirit in the hearts of His own people, humbling Himself not only in the condescension of grace towards them, but in taking His place as one of them in their true position before God; not merely to comfort their hearts by such kindness, but in order to sympathise with all their sorrows and their difficulties; in order to be the pattern, the source, and the perfect expression of every sentiment suitable to their position.

With wicked unrepentant Israel He could not associate Himself, but with the first living effect of the word and Spirit of God in the poor of the flock, He could and did in grace. He does so now. With the first right step, one really of God, Christ is found.

But there was yet more. He comes to bring those who received Him into relation with God, according to the favor which rested on perfectness like His, and on the love which, by taking up His people's cause, satisfied the heart of the Lord, and, having perfectly glorified God in all that He is, made it possible for Him to satisfy Himself with goodness. We know

indeed that in order to do this, the Savior had to lay down His life, because the condition of the Jew, as that of every man, required this sacrifice before either the one or the other could stand in relation with the God of truth. But even for this the love of Jesus did not fail. Here however He is leading them on to the enjoyment of the blessing expressed in His Person, which should be securely founded on that sacrifice — blessing which they must reach by the path of repentance, into which they entered by John's baptism; which Jesus received with them, that they might go on together towards the possession of all the good things which God has prepared for them that loved Him.

John, feeling the dignity and excellency of the Person of Him who came unto him, opposes the Lord's intention. The Holy Ghost by this brings out the true character of the Lord's action. As to Himself, it was righteousness which brought Him there, and not sin — righteousness which He accomplished in love. He, as well as John the Baptist, fulfilled that which belonged to the place assigned Him by God. With what condescension He links Himself at the same time with John — "It becometh us." He is the lowly and obedient Servant. It was thus He ever behaved Himself on earth. Moreover, as to His position, grace brought Jesus there, where sin brought us, who came in by the door the Lord had opened for His sheep. In confessing sin as it is, in coming before God in the confession of (the opposite of sin morally) our sin, we find ourselves in company with Jesus.\* Indeed it is in us the fruit of His Spirit. This was the case with the poor sinners who came out to John. Thus it was that Jesus took His place in righteousness and obedience among men, and more exactly among the repentant Jews. It is in this position of a manrighteous, obedient, and fulfilling on earth, in perfect humility, the work for which He had offered Himself in grace, according to Psalm 40, giving Himself up to the accomplishment of all the will of God in complete renunciation — that God His Father fully acknowledged Him, and sealed Him, declaring Him on earth to be His well-beloved Son.

[\* It is the same thing as to the sense of our nothingness. He made Himself nothing, and in the consciousness of our nothingness we find ourselves with Him, and at the same time are filled with His fullness. Even when we fall, it is not until we are brought to know ourselves as we really are that we find Jesus raising us up again.]



Being baptised — the most striking token of the place He had taken with His people — the heavens are opened unto Him, and He sees the Holy Ghost descending on Him like a dove; and, lo! a voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

But these circumstances demand attention.

Never were the heavens opened to the earth, nor to a man on the earth, before the beloved Son was there.\* God had doubtless, in His longsuffering and in the way of providence, blessed all His creatures; He had also blessed His own people, according to the rules of His government on earth. Besides this, there were the elect, whom He had preserved in faithfulness. Nevertheless until now the heavens had not been opened. A testimony had been sent by God in connection with His government of the earth; but there was no object on the earth upon which the eye of God could rest with complacency, until Jesus, sinless and obedient, His beloved Son, stood there. But what is so precious to us is, that it is as soon as in grace He takes publicly this place of humiliation with Israel — that is, with the faithful remnant, presenting Himself thus before God, fulfilling His will — the heavens open upon an object worthy of their attention. Ever doubtless was He worthy of their adoration, even before the world was. But now He has just taken this place in the dealings of God as a man, and the heavens opened unto Jesus, the object of God’s entire affection on the earth. The Holy Ghost descends upon Him visibly. And He, a man on earth, a man taking His place with the meek of the people who repented, is acknowledged as the Son of God. He is not only anointed of God, but, as man, He is conscious of the descent of the Holy Ghost upon Him — the seal of the Father set upon Him. Here it is evidently not His divine nature, in the character of the Eternal Son of the Father. The seal would not even be in conformity with that character; and as to His Person it is manifested, and His consciousness of it, at twelve years old in Luke’s Gospel. But while He is such, He is also a man, the Son of God on the earth, and is sealed as a man. As a man He has the consciousness of the immediate presence of the Holy Ghost with Him. This presence is in connection with the character of lowliness, meekness, and obedience, in which the Lord appeared down here. It is “like a dove” that the Holy Ghost descends upon Him; just as it was in the form of tongues of fire, that He came down upon the heads of the disciples, for their testimony in power in this world,

according to the grace which addressed each and every one in his own language.

[\* In the beginning of Ezekiel, it is said indeed that the heavens were opened; but this was only in vision, as the prophet himself explains. In that instance it was the manifestation of God in judgment.]

Jesus thus creates in His own position as man the place into which He introduces us by redemption (John 20:17). But the glory of His Person is always carefully guarded. There is no object presented to Jesus, as to Saul for instance, and, in a still more analogous case, to Stephen, who, being full of the Spirit, sees also the heavens opened, and looks up into them, and sees Jesus, the Son of man, and is transformed into His image. Jesus has come; He is Himself the object over whom the heavens open; He has no transforming object, as Stephen, or as we ourselves in the Spirit; heaven looks down at Him, the perfect object of delight. It is His relationship with His Father, already existing, which is sealed.\* Neither does the Holy Ghost create His character (except so far as, with respect to His human nature, He was conceived in the virgin Mary's womb by the power of the Holy Ghost); He had connected Himself with the poor, in the perfection of that character, before He was sealed, and then acts according to the energy and the power of that which He received without measure in His human life here below (compare Acts 10:38, Matthew 12:28, John 3:34).

[\* This is true also of us when we are in that relationship by grace.]

We find in the word four memorable occasions on which the heavens open. Christ is the object of each of these revelations; each has its especial character. Here the Holy Ghost descends upon Him, and He is acknowledged the Son of God (compare John 1:33, 34). At the end of the same chapter of John, He declares Himself to be the Son of man. There it is the angels of God who ascend and descend upon Him. He is, as Son of man, the object of their ministry.\* At the end of Acts 7 an entirely new scene is opened. The Jews reject the last testimony that God sends them. Stephen, by whom this testimony is rendered, is filled with the Holy Ghost, and the heavens are opened to him. The earthly system was definitely closed by the rejection of the Holy Ghost's testimony to the glory of the ascended Christ. But this is not merely a testimony. The Christian is filled with the Spirit, heaven is opened to him, the glory of God is manifested to him, and the Son of man appears to him, standing at

the right hand of God. This is a different thing from the heavens open over Jesus, the object of God's delight on earth. It is heaven open to the Christian himself, his object being there when rejected on earth. He sees there by the Holy Ghost the heavenly glory of God, and Jesus, the Son of man, the special object of the testimony he renders, in the glory of God. The difference is as remarkable as it is interesting to us; and it exhibits, in a most striking manner, the true position of the Christian as on earth, and the change which the rejection of Jesus by His earthly people has produced. Only, the church, the union of believers in one body with the Lord in heaven, was not yet revealed. Afterwards (Revelation 19) heaven opens, and the Lord Himself comes forth, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Thus we see: 31 Jesus, the Son of God on earth, the object of heaven's delight, sealed with the Holy Ghost; Jesus, the Son of man, the object of the ministry of heaven, angels being His servants; Jesus, on high at the right hand of God, and the believer, full of the Spirit, and suffering here for His sake, beholding the glory on high, and the Son of man in the glory; and Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, coming forth to judge and make war against the scornful men who dispute His authority and oppress the earth.

[\* It is all a mistake to make Christ the ladder. He, as Jacob was, is the object of their service and ministry.]

To return: the Father Himself acknowledges Jesus, the obedient man on earth, who enters as the true Shepherd by the door, as His beloved Son in whom is all His delight. Heaven is opened to Him; He sees the Holy Ghost come down to seal Him, the infallible strength and support of the perfection of His human life; and He has the Father's own testimony to the relationship between them. No object on which His faith was to rest is presented to Him as it is to us. It is His own relation to heaven and to His Father which is sealed. His soul enjoys it through the descent of the Holy Ghost and the voice of His Father.

But this passage in Matthew requires some further notice. The blessed Lord, or rather what occurred as to Him, gives the place or model in which He sets believers, be they Jew or Gentile: only of course we are brought there by redemption. "I go to my Father and your Father, my God and your God," is His blessed word after His resurrection. But to us heaven is opened; we are sealed with the Holy Ghost; the Father owns us as sons.

Only the divine dignity of Christ's Person is always carefully guarded here in humiliation, as in the transfiguration in glory. Moses and Elias are in the same glory, but disappear when Peter's haste, permitted to be expressed, would put them on a level. The nearer we are to a divine Person, the more we adore and recognise what He is.

But another very remarkable fact is found here. For the first time, when Christ takes this place among men in lowliness, the Trinity is fully revealed. No doubt the Son and Spirit are mentioned in the Old Testament. But there the unity of the Godhead is the great revealed point. Here the Son is owned in man, the Holy Ghost comes down on Him, and the Father owns Him as His Son. What a wonderful connection with man! what a place for man to be in! Through Christ's connection with Him the Godhead is revealed in its own fullness. His being a man draws it out in its display. But He was really a man, but the Man in whom the counsels of God about man were to be fulfilled.

Hence, as He has realised and displayed the place in which man is set with God in His own Person, and in the counsels of grace as to us our relationship with God, so, as we are in conflict with the enemy, He enters into that side of our position also. We have our relationship with God and our Father, and now we have to say to Satan also. He overcomes for us, and shows us how to overcome. Remark too, the relationship with God is first fully settled and brought out, and then, as in that place, the conflict with Satan begins, and so with us. But the first question was, Would the second Adam stand where the first had failed? only, in the wilderness of this world and Satan's power — instead of the blessings of God — for there we had got.

Another point is to be remarked here, fully to bring out the place the Lord takes. The law and the prophets were till John. Then the new thing is announced, the kingdom of heaven. But judgment closes with God's people. The axe is at the root of the trees, the fan is in the hand of the coming One, the wheat is gathered into God's garner, the chaff burnt up. That is, there is a close of the history of God's people in judgment. We come in on the ground of being lost, anticipating the judgment; but man's history as responsible was closed. Hence it is said, "now once in the end of the world he hath appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

It has happened externally and literally to Israel; but it is morally true for us: only we are gathered for heaven, as in result the remnant then, and shall be in heaven. But, Christ rejected, the history of responsibility is over, and we come in grace as already lost. Consequent on the announcement of this as imminent, Christ comes and, identifying Himself with the remnant who escape on repentance, makes this new place for man on the earth: only we could not be in it till redemption was accomplished. Still He revealed the Father's name to those He had given Him out of it.

Having thus in grace taken up His position as man on earth, He commences (chap. 4) His earthly career, being led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. The righteous and holy man, the Son of God, enjoying the privileges proper to such a one, He must undergo the trial of those devices through which the first Adam fell. It is His spiritual condition which is tested. It is not now an innocent man in the enjoyment of all God's natural blessings, who is put to the proof in the midst of those blessings which should have made him remember God. Christ, nigh to God as His beloved Son, but in the midst of trial, having the knowledge of good and evil, and as to outward circumstances come down into the midst of man's fallen state, must have His faithfulness to this position fully tried with respect to His perfect obedience. To maintain this position, He must have no other will than that of His Father, and fulfill it or suffer it, whatever might be the consequences to Himself. He must fulfill it in the midst of all the difficulties, the privations, the isolation, the desert, where Satan's power was, which might tempt Him to follow an easier path than that which should be only for the glory of His Father. He must renounce all the rights that belonged to His own Person, save as He should receive them from God, yielding them up to Him with a perfect trust.

The enemy did his utmost to induce Him to make use of His privileges, "if thou be the Son of God," for His own relief, apart from the command of God, and in avoidance of the sufferings which might accompany the performance of His will. But it was to lead Him to do His own will, not God's.

Jesus, enjoying in His own Person and relationship with God the full favor of God as Son of God, the light of His countenance, goes into the wilderness for forty days to be in conflict with the enemy. He did not go

away from man, and from all intercourse with man and the things of man, in order (like Moses and Elias) to be with God. Being already fully with God, He is separate from men by the power of the Holy Ghost to be alone in His conflict with the enemy. In the case of Moses, it was man out of his natural condition to be with God. In the case of Jesus, it is so to be with the enemy: to be with God was His natural position.

The enemy tempts Him first by proposing to Him to satisfy His bodily need, and, instead of waiting on God, to employ according to His own will and on His own behalf the power with which He was endowed. But, if Israel was fed in the wilderness with manna from God, the Son of God, however great His power, would act in accordance with what Israel should have learnt by that means, namely, that “man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” The Man, the obedient Jew, the Son of God, waited for this word, and would do nothing without it. He was not come to do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him. This is the principle that characterises the Spirit of Christ in the Psalms. No deliverance is accepted but the intervention of Jehovah at His own good time. It is perfect patience, in order to be perfect and complete in all the will of God. There could be no sinful lust in Christ; but to be hungry was no sin, yet it was a human need, and what harm in eating when hungry? There was no will of God to do it, and that will by the word He came to do. Satan’s suggestion was, “if thou be the Son of God, command”; but He had taken the place of a servant, and this was not commanding: he sought to get the Lord out of the place of perfect service and obedience, out of the place of a servant.

And note here the place the written word has, and the character of Christ’s obedience. This character is not simply that the will of God is a rule; it is the one motive for action. We have a will arrested often by the word. Not so Christ. His Father’s will was His motive; He acted not merely according to, but because it was, God’s will. We delight to see a child who would run off to something it delights in, stop and cheerfully do its parents’ will when called to do it. But Christ never obeyed thus, never sought a will of His own, but was stopped by His Father’s. And we are sanctified to the obedience of Christ. Note further that the written word is that by which He lives and by which He overcomes. All depended here on Christ’s victory, as all did on Adam’s fall. But for Christ, one text, rightly used of

course, suffices. He seeks no other: that is obedience. It suffices for Satan; he has no reply. His wiles are thus defeated.

The first principle of conquest is simple and absolute obedience, living by words out of God's mouth. The next is perfect confidence in the path of obedience.

In the second place then, the enemy sets Him on a pinnacle of the temple, to induce Him to apply to Himself the promises made to the Messiah, without abiding in the ways of God. The faithful man may assuredly reckon on the help of God while walking in His ways. The enemy would have the Son of man put God to the test (instead of reckoning on Him while walking in His ways) to see whether He might be trusted in. This would have been a want of confidence in God, not obedience; or pride, presuming on its privileges, instead of counting on God in obedience.\* Taking His place with Israel in the condition they were in when without a king in the land, and, quoting the directions given to them in that book to guide them in the godly path there taught, He uses for His guidance that part of the word which contains the divine injunction on this subject, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God"; a passage often quoted as if it forbade excess in trusting God; whereas it means not to distrust, and try if He is faithful. They tempted God, saying, Is God indeed among us? And this Satan would have had the Lord do.

[\* We need confidence to have courage to obey; but true confidence is found in the path of obedience. Satan could use the word in guile, but not turn Christ the Lord from it. He still uses it as the adequate divine weapon, and Satan still has no reply. To have forbidden obedience would have been to show himself Satan. As regards the place in which the Lord was dispensationally, we may remark the Lord always quotes from Deuteronomy.]

The enemy, failing to deceive that obedient heart, even by hiding himself under the use of the word of God, shows himself in his true character, tempting the Lord, thirdly, to spare Himself all the sufferings that awaited Him, by showing Him the inheritance of the Son of man on earth, that which would be His when He had reached it through all those paths, toilsome yet necessary to the Father's glory, which the Father had marked out for Him. All should now be His, if He would acknowledge Satan by worshipping him, the God of this world. This in fact was what the kings of the earth had done for only a part of these things; how often done for

some trifling vanity! but He should have the whole. But if Jesus was to inherit earthly glory (as well as all other) the object of His heart was God Himself, His Father, to glorify Him. Whatever might be the value of the gift, it was as the gift of the Giver that His heart prized it. Moreover He was in the position of tested man and a faithful Israelite; and whatever might be the trial of patience into which the sin of the people had brought Him, be the trial ever so great, He would serve none but His God alone.

But if the devil carries temptation, sin, to the utmost, and shows himself to be the adversary (Satan), the believer has the right to cast him out. If he comes as a tempter, the believer should answer him by the faithfulness of the word, which is man's perfect guide, according to the will of God. He does not need to see through everything. The word is the word of Him who does, and in following that, we walk according to a wisdom which knows everything, and in a path formed by that wisdom, and which hence involves absolute trust in God. The two first temptations were the wiles of the devil, the third, open hostility to God. If he comes as the open adversary of God, the believer has a right to have nothing to do with him. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." He knows he has met Christ, not flesh. May believers resist if Satan would tempt them by the world, remembering it is Satan's domain in fallen man!

The believer's safeguard, morally (that is, as to the state of his heart) is a single eye. If I seek only the glory of God, that which presents no other motive than my own aggrandisement, or my own gratification, whether of body or mind, will have no hold upon me; and will show itself in the light of the word, which guides the single eye, as contrary to the mind of God. This is not the haughtiness that rejects temptation on the ground of being good; it is obedience, humbly giving God His place, and consequently His word also. "By the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer," from him that did his own will and made it his guide. If the heart seeks God alone, the most subtle snare is discovered, for the enemy never tempts us to seek God alone. But this supposes a pure heart, and that there is no self-seeking. This was displayed in Jesus.

Our safeguard against temptation is the word, used by the discernment of a perfectly pure heart, which lives in the presence of God, and learns the mind of God in His word,\* and therefore knows its application to the



circumstances presented. It is the word that preserves the soul from the wiles of the enemy.

[\* There must be no other motive for action than the will of God, which, for man, is always to be found in the word; because, in that case, when Satan tempts us to act, as he always does, by some other motive, this motive is seen to be opposed to the word which is in the heart, and to the motive which governs the heart, and is therefore judged as being opposed to it. It is written, "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee." This is the reason why it is so often important, when we are in doubt, to ask ourselves by what motive we are influenced.]

Observe also that, consequently, it is in the spirit of simple and humble obedience that power lies; for where it exists, Satan can do nothing. God is there, and accordingly the enemy is conquered.

It appears to me that these three temptations are addressed to the Lord in the three characters, of man, of Messiah, and of Son of man.

He had no sinful desires like fallen man, but He was an hungered. The tempter would persuade Him to satisfy this need without God.

The promises in the Psalms belonged to Him as being made to the Messiah.

And all the kingdoms of the world were His as the Son of man.

He always replies as a faithful Israelite, personally responsible to God, making use of the Book of Deuteronomy, which treats of this subject (namely, the obedience of Israel, in connection with the possession of the land, and the privileges that belonged to the people in connection with this obedience; and this, apart from the organisation which constituted them a corporate body before God).\*

[\* A careful examination of the Pentateuch will show that, though needed historical facts are stated, yet the contents of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers are essentially typical. The tabernacle was made according to the pattern shown in the mount — the pattern of heavenly things; and not only the ceremonial ordinances, but the historical facts, as the apostle distinctly states, happened unto them for types, and are written for our instruction. Deuteronomy gives directions for their conduct in the land; but the three books named, even where there are historical facts, are typical in their object. I do not know if one sacrifice was offered after they were instituted, unless perhaps the official ones (see Acts 7:42).]

Satan departs from Him, and the angels come to exercise their ministry towards the Messiah, the Son of man victorious through obedience. What Satan would have Him try God about, He has fully. They are ministering spirits for us also.

But how profoundly interesting is it to see the blessed Lord come down, the Son of God from heaven, and take — the Word made flesh — His place among the poor godly ones on the earth, and, as having taken that place, owned of the Father as His Son, heaven being opened and opened to Him as man, and the Holy Ghost coming down and abiding on Him as man though without measure, and so forming the model of our place, though we were not yet in it; the whole Trinity, as I have said, being first fully revealed when He is thus associated with man; and then, we being slaves to Satan, going in this character and relationship to meet also Satan for us, to bind the strong man, and give man through Him this place also: only for us redemption was needed to bring us where He is.

John being cast into prison, the Lord departs into Galilee. This movement, which determined the scene of His ministry outside Jerusalem and Judea, had great significance with respect to the Jews. The people (so far as centered in Jerusalem, and boasting in the possession of the promises, the sacrifices, and the temple, and in being the royal tribe) lost the presence of the Messiah, the Son of David. He went away for the manifestation of His Person, for the testimony of God's intervention in Israel, to the poor and despised of the flock; for the remnant and poor of the flock are already in chapters 3, 4 clearly distinguished from the heads of the people. He thus really became the true stock, instead of being a branch of that which had been planted elsewhere; although this effect was not yet fully manifested. The moment corresponds with John 4.

We may remark here, that, in John's Gospel, the Jews are always distinguished from the multitude, called the people in the Gospels. The language, or rather the pronunciation, was entirely different. They did not speak Chaldee in Galilee.

At the same time this manifestation of the Son of David in Galilee was the fulfillment of a prophecy in Isaiah. The force of that prophecy is this: although the Roman captivity was far more terrible than the invasion of the Assyrians when they came up against the land of Israel, there was

nevertheless this circumstance which altered everything, namely, the presence of the Messiah, the true Light, in the land.

We observe that the Spirit of God here passes over the whole history of Jesus until the commencement of His ministry after the death of John the Baptist. He gives Jesus His proper position in the midst of Israel — Emmanuel, the Son of David, the Beloved of God, acknowledged as His Son, the faithful One in Israel, though exposed to all Satan's temptations; and then at once, afterwards, His prophetic position announced by Isaiah, and the kingdom proclaimed as at hand.\*

[\* And we may remark here, that He leaves the Jews and Jerusalem, as already remarked, and His natural place, so to speak, what gave Him His name, Nazareth, and takes His prophetic place. The casting of John into prison was significant of His own rejection. John was His forerunner in it, as in his mission, of the Lord. See chapter 17:12. The testimony of Jesus is the same as that of John the Baptist.]

He then gathers around Him those who were definitively to follow Him in His ministry and His temptations; and, at His call, to link their portion and their lot with His, forsaking all beside.

The strong man was bound, so that Jesus could spoil his goods, and proclaim the kingdom with proofs of that power which were able to establish it.

Two things are then brought forward in the Gospel narrative. First, the power which accompanies the proclamation of the kingdom. In two or three verses,\* without other detail, this fact is announced. The proclamation of the kingdom is attended with acts of power that excite the attention of the whole country, the whole extent of the ancient territory of Israel. Jesus appears before them invested with this power. Secondly (chaps. 5-7) the character of the kingdom is announced in the sermon on the Mount, as well as that of the persons who should have part in it (the Father's name withal being revealed). That is, the Lord had announced the coming kingdom, and with the present power of goodness, having overcome the adversary; and then shows what were the true characters according to which it would be set up, and who could enter, and how. Redemption is not spoken of in it; but the character and nature of the kingdom, and who could enter. This clearly shows the moral position which this sermon holds in the Lord's teaching.

- [\* It is striking that the whole ministry of the Lord is recounted in one verse (23). All the subsequent statements are facts, having a special moral import, showing what was passing amongst the people in grace onward to His rejection, not a proper consecutive history. It stamps the character of Matthew very clearly.]

It is evident that, in all this part of the Gospel, it is the Lord's position which is the subject of the teaching of the Spirit, and not the details of His life. Details come after, in order fully to exhibit what He was in the midst of Israel, His relations with that people, and His path in the power of the Spirit which led to the rupture between the Son of David and the people who ought to have received Him. The attention of the whole country being thus engaged by His mighty acts, the Lord sets before His disciples — but in the hearing of the people — the principles of His kingdom.

This discourse may be divided into the following parts:\* 41 The character and the portion of those who should be in the kingdom (v. 112). Their position in the world (v. 13-16). The connection between the principles of the kingdom and the law (v. 17-48).\*\* The spirit in which His disciples should perform good works (chap. 6:118). Separation from the spirit of the world and from its anxieties (v. 1934). The spirit of their relation with others (chap. 7:1-6). The confidence in God which became them (v. 7-12). The energy that should characterise them, in order that they might enter into the kingdom; not however merely enter, many would seek to do that, but according to those principles which made it difficult for man, according to God — the strait gate; and then, the means of discerning those who would seek to deceive them, as well as the watchfulness needed that they might not be deceived (v. 13-23).

- [\* In the text I have given a division which may assist in a practical application of the sermon on the Mount. With respect to the subjects contained in it, it might perhaps, though the difference is not very great, be still better divided thus: Chapter 5:1-16 contains the complete picture of the character and position of the remnant who received His instructions — their position, as it should be, according to the mind of God. This is complete in itself. Verses 17-48 establish the authority of the law, which should have regulated the conduct of the faithful until the introduction of the kingdom; the law which they ought to have fulfilled, as well as the words of the prophets, in order that they (the remnant) should be placed on this new ground; and the despal of which would exclude whoever was guilty of it from the kingdom; for Christ is speaking, not as in the kingdom, but as announcing it as near to come. But, while thus establishing the authority of the law, He takes up the two great elements of evil, treated of only in outward acts in the law, violence and corruption, and judges the evil in the heart (22, 28), and at all

cost to get rid of it and every occasion of it, thus showing what was to be the conduct of His disciples, and their state of soul — that which was to characterise them as such. The Lord then takes up certain things born with by God in Israel, and ordered according to what they could bear. Thus was now brought into the light of a true moral estimate, divorce — marriage being the divinely given basis of all human relationships — and swearing or vowing, the action of man's will in relationship to God; then patience of evil, and fullness of grace, His own blessed character, and carrying with it the moral title to what was His living place — sons of their Father who was in heaven. Instead of weakening that which God required under the law, He would not only have it observed until its fulfillment, but that His disciples should be perfect even as their Father in heaven was perfect. This adds the revelation of the Father, to the moral walk and state which suited the character of sons as it was revealed in Christ. Chapter 6. We have the motives, the object, which should govern the heart in doing good deeds, in living a religious life. Their eye should be on their Father. This is individual. Chapter 7. This chapter is essentially occupied with the intercourse that would be suitable between His own people and others — not to judge their brethren and to beware of the profane. He then exhorts them to confidence in asking their Father for what they needed, and instructs them to act towards others with the same grace that they would wish shown to themselves. This is founded on the knowledge of the goodness of the Father. Finally, He exhorts them to the energy that will enter in at the strait gate, and choose the way of God, cost what it may (for many would like to enter into the kingdom, but not by that gate); and He warns them with respect to those who would seek to deceive them by pretending to have the word of God. It is not only our own hearts that we have to fear, and positive evil, when we would follow the Lord, but also the devices of the enemy and his agents. But their fruits will betray them.]

[\* It is important however to remark that there is no general spiritualisation of the law, as is often stated. The two great principles of immorality amongst men are treated of (violence and corrupt lust), to which are added voluntary oaths. In these the exigencies of the law and what Christ required are contrasted.]

Real and practical obedience to His sayings, the true wisdom of those that hear His words (v. 24-29).

There is another principle that characterises this discourse, and that is the introduction of the Father's name. Jesus puts His disciples in connection with His Father, as their Father. He reveals to them the Father's name, in order that they may be in relation with Him, and that they may act in accordance with that which He is.

This discourse gives the principles of the kingdom, but supposes the rejection of the King, and the position into which this would bring those that were His; who consequently must look for a heavenly reward. They

were to be a divine savor where God was known and was dealing, and would be a spectacle to the whole world. Moreover this was God's object. Their confession was to be so open that the world should refer their works to the Father. They were to act, on the one hand, according to a judgment of evil which reached the heart and motives, but also, on the other, according to the Father's character in grace — to approve themselves to the Father who saw in secret, where the eye of man could not penetrate. They were to have full confidence in Him for all their need. His will was the rule according to which there was entrance into the kingdom.

We may observe that this discourse is connected with the proclamation of the kingdom as being near at hand, and that all these principles of conduct are given as characterising the kingdom, and as the conditions of entrance into it. No doubt it follows that they are suitable to those who have entered in. But the discourse is pronounced in the midst of Israel,\* before the kingdom is set up, and as the previous state called for in order to enter, and to set forth the fundamental principles of the kingdom in connection with that people, and in moral contrast with the ideas they had formed respecting it.

- [\* We must always remember that, while dispensationally Israel has great importance, as the center of God's government of this world, morally Israel was just man where all the ways and dealings of God had been carried out so as to bring to light what he was. The Gentile was man left to himself as regards God's special ways, and so unrevealed. Christ was a light, to reveal the Gentiles, Luke 2:32.]

In examining the beatitudes, we shall find that this portion in general gives the character of Christ Himself. They suppose two things; the coming possession of the land of Israel by the meek; and the persecution of the faithful remnant, really righteous in their ways, and who asserted the rights of the true King (heaven being set before them as their hope to sustain their hearts).\*

- [\* The characters pronounced blessed may be briefly noted. They suppose evil in the world, and amongst God's people. The first is not seeking great things for self, but accepting a despised place in a scene contrary to God. Hence mourning characterises them there, and meekness, a will not lifting up itself against God, or to maintain its position or right. Then positive good in desire, for it is not yet found; hungering hence and thirsting after it, such is the inward state and activity of the mind. Then grace towards others. Then purity of heart, the absence of what would shut out God; and, what is always connected with it, peacefulness and peace-making. I think there is

moral progress in the verses, one leading to the next as an effect of it. The two last are the consequences of maintaining a good conscience and connection with Christ in a world of evil. There are two principles of suffering, as in 1 Peter, for righteousness' and Christ's sake.]

This will be the position of the remnant in the last days before the introduction of the kingdom, the last being exceptional. It was so, morally, in the days of the Lord's disciples, in reference to Israel, the earthly part being delayed. In reference to heaven, the disciples are looked at as witnesses in Israel; but — while the only preservative of the earth — they were a testimony to the world. So that the disciples are seen as in connection with Israel, but, at the same time, as witnesses on God's part to the world (the kingdom being in view, but not yet established). The connection with the last days is evident; nevertheless their testimony then had, morally, this character. Only the establishment of the earthly kingdom has been delayed, and the church, which is heavenly, brought in. Chapter 5:25 evidently alludes to the position of Israel in the days of Christ. And in fact they remain captive, in prison, until they have received their full chastisement, and then they shall come forth.

The Lord ever speaks and acts as the obedient man, moved and guided by the Holy Ghost; but we see in the most striking manner, in this Gospel, who it is that acts thus. And it is this which gives its true moral character to the kingdom of heaven. John the Baptist might announce it as a change of dispensation, but his ministry was earthly. Christ might equally announce this same change (and the change was all-important); but in Him there was more than this. He was from heaven, the Lord who came from heaven. In speaking of the kingdom of heaven, He spoke out of the deep and divine abundance of His heart. No man had been in heaven, excepting Him who had come down from thence, the Son of man who was in heaven. Therefore, when speaking of heaven, He spoke of that which He knew, and testified of that which He had seen This was the case in two ways, as shown forth in Matthew's Gospel. It was no longer an earthly government according to the law; Jehovah, the Savior, Emmanuel, was present Could He be otherwise than heavenly in His character, in the tone, in the essence, of His whole life?

Moreover, when He began His public ministry and was sealed by the Holy Ghost, heaven was opened to Him. He was identified with heaven as a

man sealed with the Holy Ghost on earth. He was thus the continual expression of the spirit, of the reality, of heaven. There was not yet the exercise of the judicial power which would uphold this character in the face of all that opposed it. It was its manifestation in patience, notwithstanding the opposition of all around Him and the inability of His disciples to understand Him. Thus in the sermon on the Mount we find the description of that which was suitable to the kingdom of heaven, and even the assurance of reward in heaven for those who should suffer on earth for His sake. This description, as we have seen, is essentially the character of Christ Himself. It is thus that a heavenly spirit expresses itself on earth. If the Lord taught these things, it is because He loved them, because He was them and delighted in them. Being the God of heaven, filled as man with the Spirit without measure, His heart was perfectly in unison with a heaven that He perfectly knew. Consequently therefore He concludes the character which His disciples were to assume by these words: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." All their conduct was to be in reference to their Father in heaven. The more we understand the divine glory of Jesus, the more we understand the way in which He was as man in connection with heaven, the better shall we apprehend what the kingdom of heaven was to Him with regard to that which was suitable to it. When it shall be established hereafter in power, the world will be governed according to these principles, although they are not, properly speaking, its own.

The remnant in the last days, I doubt not, finding all around them contrary to faithfulness, and seeing all Jewish hope fail before their eyes, will be forced to look upward, and will more and more acquire this character, which, if not heavenly, is at least very much conformed to Christ.\*

[\* Those who are put to death will go up to heaven, as Matthew 5:12 testifies, and the Apocalypse also. The others, who are thus conformed to Christ, as a suffering Jew, will be with Him on Mount Sion; they will learn the song which is sung in heaven, and will follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth (on earth). We may also remark here, that in the beatitudes there is the promise of the earth to the meek, which will be literally fulfilled in the last days. In verse 12 a reward in heaven is promised to those who suffer for Christ, true for us now, and in some sort for those who shall be slain for His sake in the last days, who will have their place in heaven, although they were a part of the Jewish remnant and not the assembly. The same are found in Daniel 7: only, remark, it is the times and laws which are delivered into the beast's hands, not the saints.]



There are two things connected with the presence of the multitude, v. 1. First, the time required that the Lord should give a true idea of the character of His kingdom, since already He drew the multitude after Him. His power making itself felt, it was important to make His character known. On the other hand, this multitude who were following Jesus were a snare to His disciples; and He makes them understand what an entire contrast there was between the effect which this multitude might have upon them, and the right spirit which ought to govern them. Thus, full Himself of what was really good, He immediately brings forward that which filled His own heart. This was the true character of the remnant, who in the main resembled Christ in it. It is often thus in the Psalms.

The salt of the earth is a different thing from the light of the world. The earth, it appears to me, expresses that which already professed to have received light from God — that which was in relationship with Him by virtue of the light — having assumed a definite shape before Him. The disciples of Christ were the preservative principle in the earth. They were the light of the world, which did not possess that light. This was their position, whether they would or no. It was the purpose of God that they should be the light of the world. A candle is not lighted in order to be hidden.

All this supposes the case of the possibility of the kingdom being established in the world, but the opposition of the greater part of men to its establishment. It is not a question of the sinner's redemption, but of the realisation of the character proper to a place in the kingdom of God; that which the sinner ought to seek while he is in the way with his adversary, lest he should be delivered to the judge — which indeed has happened to the Jews.

At the same time the disciples are brought into relationship with the Father individually — the second great principle of the discourse, the consequence of the Son being there — and a yet more excellent thing is set before them than their position of testimony for the kingdom. They were to act in grace, even as their Father acted, and their prayer should be for an order of things in which all would correspond morally to the character and the will of their Father. "Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come,"\* is, that all should answer to the character of the Father, that all should be the

effect of His power. “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” is perfect obedience. Universal subjection to God in heaven and on earth will be, to a certain point, accomplished by the intervention of Christ in the millennium, and absolutely so when God shall be all in all. Meanwhile the prayer expresses daily dependence, the need of pardon, the need of being kept from the power of the enemy, the desire of not being sifted by him, as a dispensation of God, like Job or Peter, and of being preserved from evil.

[\* That is, the Father’s. Compare Matthew 13:43.]

This prayer also is adapted to the position of the remnant; it passes over the dispensation of the Spirit, and even that which is proper to the millennium as an earthly kingdom, in order to express the right desires, and speak of the condition and the dangers of the remnant until the Father’s kingdom should come. Many of these principles are always true, for we are in the kingdom, and in spirit we ought to manifest its features; but the special and literal application is that which I have given. They are brought into relationship with the Father in the realisation of His character, which was to be displayed in them by virtue of this relationship, causing them to desire the establishment of His kingdom, to overcome the difficulties of an opposing world, to keep themselves from the snares of the enemy, and to do the Father’s will. It was Jesus who could impart this to them. He thus passes from the law,\* recognised as coming from God, to its fulfillment, when it shall be as it were absorbed in the will of Him who gave it, or accomplished in its purposes by Him who alone could do so in any sense whatever.

[\* The law is the perfect rule for a child of Adam, the rule or measure of what he ought to be, but not of the manifestation of God in grace as Christ was, who in this is our pattern — a just call to love God and walk in the fulfillment of duty in relationship, but not an imitating of God, walking in love, as Christ has loved us and given Himself for us.]

Then, in chapter 8, the Lord begins in the midst of Israel His patient life of testimony, which closed with His rejection by the people whom God had so long preserved for Him, and for their own blessing.

He had proclaimed the kingdom, displayed His power throughout the land, and declared His character, as well as the spirit of those who should enter the kingdom.

But His miracles,\* as well as the whole Gospel, are always characterised by His position among the Jews and God's dealings with them, till He was rejected. Jehovah, yet the man obedient to the law, foreshewing the entrance of the Gentiles into the kingdom (its establishment in mystery in the world), predicting the building of the church or assembly on the recognition of His being Son of the living God, and the kingdom in glory; and, while detecting as the effect of His presence the perversity of the people, yet bearing on His heart with perfect patience the burden of Israel.\*\* It is Jehovah present in goodness, outwardly one of themselves: wondrous truth!

[\* The miracles of Christ had a peculiar character. They were not merely acts of power, but all of them of the power of God visiting this world in goodness. The power of God had been often shown specially, from Moses, but often in judgment. But Christ's were all the deliverance of men from the evil consequences sin had brought in. There was one exception, the cursing the fig tree, but this was a judicial sentence on Israel, that is, man under the old covenant when there was great appearance but no fruit.]

[\*\* I subjoin here some notes, made since this was written, as throwing, I think, light on the structure of this Gospel. Matthew 51 gives the character required for entrance into the kingdom, the character which was to mark the accepted remnant, Jehovah being now in the way with the nation to judgment. Chapters 8, 9 give the other side — grace and goodness come in, God manifest, His character and actings, that new thing which could not be put into the old bottles — still goodness in power, but rejected, the Son of man (not Messiah) who had not where to lay His head. Chapter 8 gives present intervention in temporal goodness with power. Hence, as goodness, it goes beyond Israel, as it deals in grace with what was excluded from God's camp in Israel. It includes power over all Satan's power and sickness and the elements, and that in taking the burden on Himself, but in conscious rejection. Chapter 8:1720 leads us to Isaiah 53:3, 4, and the state of things calling for the wholly following Him, giving up all. This leads to the sad testimony that, if divine power expels Satan's, the divine presence manifest in it is insupportable to the world. The swine figure Israel thereupon. Chapter 9 furnishes the religious side of His presence in grace, forgiveness, and the testimony that Jehovah was there according to Psalm 103, but there to call sinners, not the righteous; and this was especially what could not suit the old bottles. Finally, this chapter practically, save the patience of goodness, closes the history. He came to save Israel's life. It was really death when He came: only, wherever there was faith in the midst of the surrounding crowd, there was healing. The Pharisees show the blasphemy of the leaders: only the patience of grace still subsists, carried out towards Israel in chapter 10, but all found to be of no avail in chapter 11. The Son was revealing the Father, and this abides and gives rest. Chapter 12 develops fully the judgment and

rejection of Israel. Chapter 13 brings Christ as a sower, not seeking fruit in His vineyard, and the actual form of the kingdom of heaven.]

First of all, we find the healing of a leper. Jehovah alone, in His sovereign goodness, could heal the leper; here Jesus does so. "If thou wilt," says the leper, "thou canst." "I will," replies the Lord. But at the same time, while He shows forth in His own Person that which repels all possibility of defilement — that which is above sin — He shows the most perfect condescension towards the defiled one. He touches the leper, saying, "I will, be thou clean." We see the grace, the power, the undefilable holiness of Jehovah, come down in the Person of Jesus to the closest proximity to the sinner, touching him so to speak. It was indeed "the Lord that healeth thee."\* At the same time He conceals Himself, and commands the man, who had been healed, to go to the priest according to the ordinances of the law and offer his gift. He does not go out of the place of the Jew in subjection to the law; but Jehovah was there in goodness.

- [\* One who touched a leper became himself unclean, but the blessed One did come thus close to man, but removed the defilement without contracting it. The leper knew His power, but was not sure of His goodness. "I will" declared it, but with a title which God only has to

But in the next case we see a Gentile, who by faith enjoys the full effect of that power which his faith ascribed to Jesus giving the Lord occasion to bring out the solemn truth, that many of these poor Gentiles should come and sit down in the kingdom of heaven with the fathers who were honored by the Jewish nation as the first parents of the heirs of promise, while the children of the kingdom should be in outer darkness. In fact the faith of this centurion acknowledged a divine power in Jesus, which, by the glory of Him that possessed it, would (not forsake Israel, but) open the door to the Gentiles, and graft into the olive-tree of promise branches of the wild olive-tree in the place of those which should be cut off. The manner in which this should take place in the assembly was not now the question.

He does not however yet forsake Israel. He goes into Peter's house, and heals his wife's mother. He does the same to all the sick who crowd around the house at even, when the sabbath was over. They are healed, the devils are cast out, so that the prophecy of Isaiah was being fulfilled: "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." Jesus put Himself in heart under the weight of all the sorrows that oppressed Israel, in order

to relieve and heal them. It is still Emmanuel, who feels for their misery and is afflicted in all their affliction, but who has come in with the power that shows Him capable of delivering them.

These three cases show this character of His ministry in a clear and striking manner. He hides Himself; for, until the moment when He would show judgment to the Gentiles, He does not lift up His voice in the streets. It is the dove that rests upon Him. These manifestations of power attract men to Him; but this does not deceive Him: He never departs in spirit from the place He has taken. He is the despised and the rejected of men; He has nowhere to lay His head. The earth had more room for the foxes and the birds than for Him, whom we have seen appear a moment before as the Lord, acknowledged at least by the necessities which He never refused to relieve. Therefore, if any man would follow Him, he must forsake all to be the companion of the Lord, who would not have come down to the earth if everything had not been in question; nor without an absolute right, although it was at the same time in a love which could only be occupied by its mission, and by the necessity that brought Him there.

The Lord on earth was everything or nothing. This, it is true, was to be felt morally in its effects, in the grace which, acting by faith, attached the believer to Him by an ineffable bond. Without this, the heart would not have been morally put to the test. But this did not make it the less true. accordingly the proofs of this were present: the winds and waves, to which in the eye of man He seemed to be exposed, obeyed His voice at once — a striking reproof to the unbelief that woke Him from His sleep, and had supposed it possible for the waves to engulf Him, and with Him the counsels and the power of Him who had created the winds and waves. It is evident that this storm was permitted in order to try their faith and manifest the dignity of His Person. If the enemy was the instrument who produced it, he only succeeded in making the Lord display His glory. Such indeed is always the case as to Christ, and for us, where faith is.

Now the reality of this power, and the manner of its operation, are forcibly proved by that which follows.

The Lord disembarks in the country of the Gergesenes. There the power of the enemy shows itself in all its horrors. If man, to whom the Lord was come in grace, did not know Him, the devils knew their Judge in the Person

of the Son of God. The man was possessed by them. The fear they had of torment at the judgment of the last day is applied in the man's mind to the immediate presence of the Lord: "Art thou come to torment us before the time?" Wicked spirits act on men by the dread of their power; they have none unless they are feared. But faith only can take this fear from man. I am not speaking of the lusts on which they act, nor of the wiles of the enemy; I speak of the power of the enemy. Resist the devil and he will flee from thee. Here the devils wished to manifest the reality of this power. The Lord permits it in order to make it plain, that in this world it is not merely man that is in question whether good or bad, but that also which is stronger than man. The devils enter into the swine, which perish in the waters. Sorrowful reality plainly demonstrated that it was no question of mere disease or of sinful lusts, but of wicked spirits! However, thanks be to God, it was a question also of One who, although a man on earth, was more powerful than they. They are compelled to acknowledge this power, and they appeal to it. There is no idea of resistance. In the temptation in the wilderness Satan had been overcome. Jesus completely delivers the man whom they had oppressed with their evil power. The power of the devils was nothing before Him. He could have delivered the world from all the power of the enemy, if that only had been in question, and from all the ills of humanity. The strong man was bound, and the Lord spoiled his goods. But the presence of God, of Jehovah, troubles the world even more than the power of the enemy degrades and domineers over mind and body. The control of the enemy over the heart — too peaceful, and alas! too little perceived — is more mighty than his strength. This succumbs before the word of Jesus; but the will of man accepts the world as it is, governed by the influence of Satan. The whole city, who had witnessed the deliverance of the demoniac and the power of Jesus present among them, entreat Him to depart. Sad history of the world! The Lord came down with power to deliver the worldman — from all the power of the enemy; but they would not. Their distance from God was moral, and not merely bondage to the enemy's power. They submitted to his yoke, they had become used to it, and they would not have the presence of God.

I doubt not that that which happened to the swine is a figure of that which happened to the impious and profane Jews who rejected the Lord Jesus.

Nothing can be more striking than the way in which a divine Person, Emmanuel, though a man in grace, is manifested in this chapter.

In the following chapter (9), while acting in the character and according to the power of Jehovah (as we read in Psalm 103), “Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases”; it is the actual grace in itself towards and for them, in which He came, which is presented. It gives the character of His ministry, as the previous one gives the dignity of His Person and the bearing of what He was. He presents Himself to Israel as their true Redeemer and Deliverer; and, to prove His title (which unbelief already opposed) to be this blessing to Israel, and to pardon all their iniquities which raised a barrier between them and their God, He accomplishes the second part of the verse, and heals the disease. Beautiful and precious testimony of kindness to Israel, and at the same time, the demonstration of His glory who stood in the midst of His people! In the same spirit, as He had forgiven, and healed, He calls the publican and goes to his house — come not to call the righteous, but sinners.

But now we enter on another portion of the instruction in this Gospel — the development of the opposition of unbelievers, of the learned men and the religionists in particular; and that of the rejection of the work and Person of the Lord.

The idea, the picture of that which took place, has been already set before us in the case of the Gergesene demoniac the power of God present for the entire deliverance of His people, of the world, if they received Him power which the devils confessed to be that which should hereafter judge and cast them out, which displayed itself in blessing to all the people of the place, but which was rejected, because they did not desire such power to dwell among them. They would not have the presence of God.

The narration of the details and the character of this rejection now commences. Observe that chapter 8:1-27 gives the manifestation of the Lord’s power — this power being truly that of Jehovah on the earth. From verse 28 the reception this power met with in the world, and the influence which governed the world, are set forth, whether as power, or morally in the hearts of men.

We come here to the historical development of the rejection of this intervention of God upon the earth.

The multitude glorify God who had given such power to a man. Jesus accepts this place. He was man: the multitude saw Him to be man, and acknowledged the power of God, but did not know how to combine the two ideas in His Person.

The grace which condemns the pretensions of man to righteousness is now set forth.

Matthew, the publican, is called; for God looks at the heart, and grace calls the elect vessels.

The Lord declares the mind of God on this subject, and His own mission. He came to call sinners; He would have mercy. It was God in grace, and not man with his pretended righteousness counting on his merits.

He assigns two reasons which make it impossible to reconcile His course with the demands of the Pharisees. How should the disciples fast when the Bridegroom was there? When the Messiah was gone, they might well do so. Moreover it is impossible to introduce the new principles and the new power of His mission into the old Pharisaic forms.

Thus we have grace to sinners, but (grace rejected) now comes at once a higher proof that Messiah-Jehovah was there, from her bed of death, He obeys the call. As He goes, a poor woman, who had already employed every means of cure without success, is instantaneously healed by touching in faith the hem of His garment.

This history supplies us with the two great divisions of the grace that was manifested in Jesus. Christ came to awaken dead Israel; He will do this hereafter in the full sense of the word. Meanwhile, whosoever laid hold of Him by faith, in the midst of the multitude that accompanied Him, was healed, let the case be ever so hopeless. This, which took place in Israel when Jesus was there, is true in principle of us also. Grace in Jesus is a power which raises from the dead, and which heals. Thus He opened the eyes of those in Israel who owned Him to be the Son of David, and who believed in His power to meet their need. He cast out devils also, and gave speech to the dumb. But having performed these acts of power in Israel, so



that the people, as to the fact, owned them with admiration, the Pharisees, the most religious part of the nation, ascribe this power to the prince of the devils. Such is the effect of the Lord's presence on the leaders of the people, jealous of His glory thus manifested among them over whom they exercised their influence. But this in no way interrupts Jesus in His career of beneficence. He can still bear testimony among the people. In spite of the Pharisees His patient kindness still finds place. He continues to preach and to heal. He has compassion on the people, who were like sheep without a shepherd, given up, morally, to their own guidance. He still sees that the harvest is plenteous and the laborers few. That is to say, He still sees every door open to address the people and He passes over the wickedness of the Pharisees.

Let us sum up what we find in the chapter, the grace developed in Israel. First, grace healing and forgiving as in Psalm 103. Then grace come to call sinners, not the righteous; the bridegroom was there, nor could grace in power be put in Jewish and Pharisaic vessels; it was new even in respect of John Baptist. He comes in reality to give life to the dead, not to heal, but whoever then touched Him by faith — for there were such — were healed in the way. He opens eyes to see, as Son of David, and opens the dumb mouth of him whom the devil possessed. All is rejected with blasphemy by the self-righteous Pharisees. But grace sees the multitude as yet as having no shepherd; and while the porter holds the door open, He ceases not to seek and minister to the sheep.

So long as God gives Him access to the people, He continues His labor of love. Nevertheless, He was conscious of the iniquity that governed the people, although He did not seek His own glory. Having exhorted His disciples to pray that laborers might be sent into the harvest, He begins (chap. 10) to act in accordance with that desire. He calls His twelve disciples, He gives them power to cast out devils and to heal the sick, and He sends them to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. We see, in this mission, how much the ways of God with Israel form the subject of this Gospel. They were to announce to that people, and to them exclusively, the nearness of the kingdom, exercising at the same time the power they had received: a striking testimony to Him who was come, and who could not only work miracles Himself, but confer power on others to do so likewise. He gave them authority over evil spirits for this purpose. It is

this which characterises the kingdom — man healed of all sickness and the devil cast out Accordingly, in Hebrews 6, miracles are called “the powers of the world to come.”\*

[\* For then Satan will be bound and man delivered by the power of Christ. And there were partial deliverances of the kind.]

They were also, with respect to their need, to depend entirely on Him who sent them. Emmanuel was there. If miracles were a proof to the world of their Master’s power, the fact that they lacked nothing should be so to their own hearts The ordinance was abrogated during that period of their ministry which followed the departure of Jesus from this world (Luke 22:35-37). That which He here (Matthew 10) commands His disciples appertains to His presence as Messiah, as Jehovah Himself, on the earth. Therefore the reception of His messengers, or their rejection, decided the fate of those to whom they were sent. In rejecting them they rejected the Lord Emmanuel, God with His people.\* But, in fact, He sent them forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. They would need the wisdom of serpents, and were to exhibit the harmlessness of doves (rare union of virtues, found only in those who, by the Spirit of the Lord, are wise unto that which is good and simple concerning evil).

[\* There is a division of the Lord’s discourse at verse 15. Up to that it is the then present mission. From verse 16 we have more general reflections on their mission, looked at as a whole in the midst of Israel on to the end. Evidently it goes beyond their then present mission and supposes the coming of the Holy Ghost. The mission by which the church is called as such is a distinct thing. This applies only to Israel they were forbidden to go to Gentiles. This necessarily closed with the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish nation, but it is to be renewed at the end, till the Son of man be come. There was a testimony to the Gentiles only, as brought before them as judges, as Paul was, and that part of his history even on to Rome in Acts, was amidst Jews. The latter part, from verse 16, has less to do with the gospel of the kingdom.]

If they did not beware of men (sad testimony as to these), they would but suffer; but when scourged and brought before councils and governors and kings, all this should become a testimony unto them — a divine means of presenting the gospel of the kingdom to kings and princes, without altering its character or accommodating it to the world, or mixing up the Lord’s people with its usages and its false greatness. Moreover circumstances like

these made their testimony much more conspicuous than association with the great ones of the earth would have done.

And, to accomplish this, they should receive such power and guidance from the Spirit of their Father as would cause the words they spoke to be not their own words, but His who inspired them. Here, again, their relation with their Father, which so distinctly characterises the sermon on the Mount, is made the basis of their capacity for the service they had to perform. We must remember that this testimony was addressed to Israel only; only that, Israel being under the yoke of the Gentiles since the time of Nebuchadnezzar, the testimony would reach their rulers.

But this testimony would excite an opposition that should break all family ties, and awaken a hatred that would not spare the life of those who had been the most beloved. He who in spite of all this should endure to the end should be saved. Nevertheless the case was urgent. They were not to resist, but if the opposition took the form of persecution, they were to flee and preach the gospel elsewhere, for before they had gone over the cities of Israel the Son of man should come.\* They were to proclaim the kingdom. Jehovah, Emmanuel, was there, in the midst of His people, and the heads of the people had called the master of the house Beelzebub. This had not stopped His testimony, but it very strongly characterised the circumstances in which this testimony was to be rendered. He sent them forth, warning them of this state of things, to maintain this final testimony among His beloved people as long as possible. This took place at that time, and it is possible, if circumstances permit, to carry it on until the Son of man comes to execute judgment. Then the master of the house will have risen up to shut the door. The “today” of Psalm 95 will be over. Israel in possession of their cities being the object of this testimony, it is necessarily suspended when they are no longer in their land. The testimony to the future kingdom given in Israel by the apostles after the Lord’s death, is an accomplishment of this mission, so far as this testimony was rendered in the land of Israel; for the kingdom might be proclaimed as to be established while Emmanuel was on the earth; or this might be by Christ’s returning from heaven as announced by Peter in Acts 3. And this might take place if Israel were in the land, even until Christ should return. Thus the testimony may be resumed in Israel, whenever

they are again in their land and the requisite spiritual power is sent forth by God.

- [\* Observe here the expression “Son of man.” This is the character in which (according to Daniel 7) the Lord will come, in a power and glory much greater than that of His manifestation as Messiah, the Son of David, and which will be displayed in a much wider sphere. As the Son of man, He is the heir of all that God destines for man (see Hebrews 2:6-8, and 1 Corinthians 15:27). He must, in consequence, seeing what man’s condition is, suffer in order to possess this inheritance. He was there as the Messiah, but He must be received in His true character, Emmanuel; and the Jews must thus be tested morally. He will not have the kingdom on carnal principles. Rejected as Messiah, as Emmanuel, He postpones the period of those events which will close the ministry of His disciples with respect to Israel, unto His coming as the Son of man. Meantime God has brought out other things that had been hidden from the foundation of the world, the true glory of Jesus the Son of God, His heavenly glory as man and the church united to Him in heaven. The Judgment of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the nation, have suspended the ministry which had begun at the moment of which the evangelist here speaks. That which has filled up the interval since then is not the subject here of the Lord’s discourse, which refers solely to the ministry that had the Jews for its object. The counsels of God with respect to the church, in connection with the glory of Jesus at the right hand of God, we shall find spoken of elsewhere. Luke will give us in more detail that which concerns the Son of man In Matthew the Holy Ghost occupies us with the rejection of Emmanuel.]

Meanwhile, the disciples were to share in Christ’s own position. If they called the master of the house Beelzebub, much more they of His household. But they were not to fear It was the necessary portion of those who were for God in the midst of the people. But there was nothing hid that should not be revealed. They themselves were to hold nothing back, but were to proclaim on the housetops all that they had been taught; for everything should be brought into the light; their faithfulness to God in this respect, as well as all other things. This, while it met the secret plottings of their enemies, was itself to characterise the ways of the disciples. God, who is light, and sees in darkness as in light, would bring all out into the light, but they were to do this morally now. Therefore were they to fear nothing while performing this work, unless it were God Himself, the righteous Judge at the last day. Moreover the hairs of their heads were numbered. They were precious to their Father, who took notice of even a sparrow’s death. This could not happen without Him who was their Father.

Finally, they were to be thoroughly imbued with the conviction that the Lord was not come to send peace on the earth; no, it should be division, even in the bosom of families. But Christ was to be more precious than father or mother, and even than a man's own life. He who would save his life at the expense of his testimony to Christ should lose it; he who would lose it for the sake of Christ should gain it. He also who should receive this testimony, in the person of the disciples, received Christ, and, in Christ, Him that sent Him. God, therefore, being thus acknowledged in the person of His witnesses on earth, would bestow, on whoever received the latter, a reward according to the testimony rendered. In thus acknowledging the testimony of the rejected Lord, were it only by a cup of cold water, he who gave it should not lose his reward. In an opposing world, he who believes the testimony of God, and receives (in spite of the world) the man who bears this testimony, really confesses God, as well as His servant. It is all that we can do. The rejection of Christ made Him a test, a touchstone.

From that hour we find the definitive judgment of the nation, not indeed as yet openly declared (that is in chapter 12), nor by the cessation of Christ's ministry, which wrought, notwithstanding the opposition of the nation, in gathering out the remnant, and in the still more important effect of the manifestation of Emmanuel; but it is unfolded in the character of His discourses, in the positive declarations which describe the condition of the people, and in the Lords conduct amid circumstances which gave rise to the expression of the relations in which He stood towards them.

In **CHAPTER 11**, having sent His disciples away to preach, He continues the exercise of His own ministry. The report of the works of Christ reaches John in prison. He, in whose heart, notwithstanding his prophetic gift, there still remained something of Jewish thoughts and hopes, sends by his disciples to ask Jesus if He is the One who should come, or if they were still to look for another.\* God allowed this question in order to put everything in its place. Christ, being the Word of God ought to be His own witness. He ought to bear testimony to Himself as well as to John, and not to receive testimony from the latter; and this He did in the presence of John's disciples He healed all the diseases of men, and preached the gospel to the poor; and John's messengers were to set before him this true testimony of what Jesus was. John was to receive it. It was by these

things men were tested. Blessed was he who should not be offended at the lowly exterior of the King of Israel. God manifest in the flesh did not come to seek the pomp of royalty, although it was His due, but the deliverance of suffering men. His work revealed a character much more profoundly divine, which had a spring of action far more glorious than that which depended on the possession of the throne of David — than a deliverance which would have set John at liberty, and put an end to the tyranny that had imprisoned him.

[\* His sending to Jesus shows full confidence in His word as a prophet but ignorance as to His Person; and this is what is brought out here in its full light.]

To undertake this ministry, to go down into the scene of its exercise, to bear the sorrows and the burdens of His people might be an occasion of stumbling to a carnal heart that was looking for the appearance of a glorious kingdom which would satisfy the pride of Israel. But was it not more truly divine more necessary to the condition of the people as seen of God? The heart of each one therefore would be thus tested, to show whether he belonged to that repentant remnant, who discerned the ways of God, or to the proud multitude, who only sought their own glory, possessing neither a conscience exercised before God, nor a sense of their need and misery.

Having set John under the responsibility of receiving this testimony, which put all Israel to the test, and distinguished the remnant from the nation in general, the Lord then bears witness to John himself, addressing the multitude, and reminding them how they had followed the preaching of John. He shows them the exact point to which Israel had come in the ways of God. The introduction, in testimony, of the kingdom made the difference between that which preceded and that which followed. Among all that are born of women there had been none greater than John the Baptist, none who had been so near Jehovah, sent before His face, none who had rendered Him a more exact and complete testimony, who had been so separate from all evil by the power of the Spirit of God — a separation proper to the fulfillment of such a mission among the people of God. Still he had not been in the kingdom: it was not yet established; and to be in the presence of Christ in His kingdom, enjoying the result of the

establishment of His glory,\* was a greater thing than all testimony to the coming of the kingdom.

[\* This is not God's assembly; but the rights of the King as manifested in glory being established, the foundation being laid, Christians are in the kingdom and the patience of Jesus Christ, who is glorified but hidden in God. They share the destiny of the King, and will share His glory when He reigns.]

Nevertheless from the time of John the Baptist there was a notable change. From that time the kingdom was announced. It was not established, but it was preached. This was a very different thing from the prophecies that spoke of the kingdom for a yet distant period, while recalling the people to the law as given by Moses. The Baptist went before the King, announcing the nearness of the kingdom, and commanding the Jews to repent that they might enter into it; Thus the law and the prophets spake on God's part until John. The law was the rule; the prophets, maintaining the rule, strengthened the hopes and the faith of the remnant. Now, the energy of the Spirit impelled men to force their way through every difficulty and all the opposition of the leaders of the nation and of a blinded people, that they might at all costs attain the kingdom of a King rejected by the blind unbelief of those who should have received Him. It needed — seeing that the King had come in humiliation, and that He had been rejected — it needed this violence to enter the kingdom. The strait gate was the only entrance.

If faith could really penetrate the mind of God therein, John was the Elias who should come. He that had ears to hear, let him hear. It was in fact for those only.

Had the kingdom appeared in the glory and in the power of its Head, violence would not have been necessary; it would have been possessed as the certain effect of that power; but it was the will of God that they should morally be tested. It was thus also that they ought to have received Elias in spirit.

The result is given in the Lord's words which follow, that is, the true character of this generation, and the ways of God in relation to the Person of Jesus, manifested by His rejection itself. As a generation the threatenings of justice, and the attractions of grace were equally lost upon them. The children of wisdom, those whose consciences were taught of

God, acknowledged the truth of John's testimony, as against themselves, and the grace, so necessary to the guilty, of the ways of Jesus.

John, separate from the iniquity of the nation, had, in their eyes, a devil. Jesus, kind to the most wretched, they accused of falling in with evil ways. Yet the evidence was powerful enough to have subdued the heart of a Tyre or Sodom; and the righteous rebuke of the Lord warns the perverse and unbelieving nation of a more terrible judgment than that which awaited the pride of Tyre or the corruption of Sodom.

But this was a test for the most favored of mankind. It might have been said, Why was the message not sent to Tyre, ready to hearken? Why not to Sodom, that that city might have escaped the fire that consumed it? It is that man must be tested in every way; that the perfect counsels of God may be developed. If Tyre or Sodom had abused the advantages which a God of creation and of providence had heaped upon them, the Jews were to manifest what was in the heart of man, when possessing all the promises and made the depositaries of all the oracles of God.

They boasted of the gift, and departed from the Giver. Their blinded heart acknowledged not and even rejected their God.

The Lord felt the contempt of His people whom He loved; but, as the obedient man on earth, He submitted to the will of His Father, who, acting in sovereignty, the Lord of heaven and earth, manifested, in the exercise of this sovereignty, divine wisdom, and the perfection of His character. Jesus accepts the will of His Father in its effects, and, thus subject, sees its perfection.

It was befitting that God should reveal to the lowly all the gifts of His grace in Jesus, this Emmanuel on earth; and that He should hide them from the pride that sought to scrutinise and to judge them. But this opens the door to the glory of God's counsels in it.

The truth was, that His Person was too glorious to be fathomed or understood by man, although His words and His works left the nation without excuse, in their refusal to come unto Him that they might know the Father.



Jesus, subject to His Father's will, although thoroughly sensible of all that was painful to His heart in its effects, sees the whole extent of the glory that should follow His rejection.

All things were delivered unto Him of His Father. It is the Son who is revealed to our faith, the veil that covered His glory being taken away now that He is rejected as Messiah. No one knoweth Him but the Father. Who among the proud could fathom what He was? He who from all eternity was one with the Father, become man, surpassed, in the deep mystery of His being, all knowledge save that of the Father Himself. The impossibility of knowing Him who had emptied Himself to become man, maintained the certainty, the reality, of His divinity, which this self-renunciation might have hidden from the eyes of unbelief. The incomprehensibility of a being in a finite form revealed the infinite which was therein. His divinity was guaranteed to faith, against the effect of His humanity on the mind of man. But if no one knew the Son, except the Father only, the Son, who is truly God, was able to reveal the Father. No man has ever seen God. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has revealed Him. No one knows the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal Him. Wretched ignorance that in its pride rejects Him! It was thus according to the good pleasure of the Son that this revelation was made. Distinctive attribute of divine perfection! He came for this purpose; He did it according to His own wisdom. Such was the truth of man's relations with Him, although He submitted to the painful humiliation of being rejected by His own people, as the final test of their, of man's state.

Observe also here, that this principle, this truth, with regard to Christ, opens the door to the Gentiles, to all who should be called. He reveals the Father to whomsoever He will. He always seeks the glory of His Father. He alone can reveal Him — He to whom the Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, has delivered all things; The Gentiles are included in the rights conferred by this title, even every family in heaven and earth. Christ exercises these rights in grace, calling whom He will to the knowledge of the Father.

Thus we find here the perverse and faithless generation; a remnant of the nation justifying the wisdom of God as manifested in John and in Jesus in judgment and in grace; the sentence of judgment on the unbelievers; the

rejection of Jesus in the character in which He had presented Himself to the nation; and His perfect submission, as man, to the will of His Father in this rejection, giving occasion for the manifestation to His soul of the glory proper to Him as Son of God — a glory which no man could know, even as He alone could reveal that of the Father. So that the world who refused Him was in total ignorance, save at the good pleasure of Him who delights in revealing the Father.

We should also remark here, that the mission of the disciples to Israel who rejected Christ continues (if Israel be in the land) until He comes as the Son of man, His title of judgment and of glory as heir of all things (that is to say, until the judgment by which He takes possession of the land of Canaan, in a power that leaves no room for His enemies). This, His title of judgment and glory as heir of all things, is mentioned in John 5, Daniel 7, Psalms 8 and 80.

Observe too, that in chapter 11, the perverseness of the generation that had rejected John's testimony, and that of the Son of man come in grace and associating Himself in grace with the Jews, opens the door to the testimony of the glory of the Son of God, and to the revelation of the Father by Him in sovereign grace — a grace that could make Him known as efficaciously to a poor Gentile as to a Jew. It was no longer a question of responsibility to receive, but of sovereign grace that imparted to whomsoever it would. Jesus knew man, the world, the generation which had enjoyed the greatest advantages of all that were in the world. There was no place for the foot to rest on in the miry slough of that which had departed from God. In the midst of a world of evil Jesus remained the sole revealer of the Father, the source of all good. Whom does He call? What does He bestow on those who come? Only source of blessing and revealer of the Father, He calls all those who are weary and heavy laden. Perhaps they did not know the spring of all misery, namely, separation from God, sin. He knew, and He alone could heal them. If it was the sense of sin which burdened them, so much the better. Every way the world no longer satisfied their hearts; they were miserable, and therefore the objects of the heart of Jesus. Moreover He would give them rest; He does not here explain by what means; He simply announces the fact. The love of the Father, which in grace, in the Person of the Son, sought out the wretched, would bestow rest (not merely alleviation or sympathy, but rest) on every

one that came to Jesus. It was the perfect revelation of the Father's name to the heart of those that needed it; and that by the Son; peace, peace with God. They had but to come to Christ: He undertook all and gave rest. But there is a second element in rest. There is more than peace through the knowledge of the Father in Jesus. And more than that is needed; for, even when the soul is perfectly at peace with God, this world presents many causes of trouble to the heart. In these cases it is a question of submission or of self-will. Christ, in the consciousness of His rejection, in the deep sorrow caused by the unbelief of the cities in which He had wrought so many miracles, had just manifested the most entire submission to His Father, and had found therein perfect rest to His soul. To this He calls all that heard Him, all that felt the need of rest to their own souls. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me," that is to say, the yoke of entire submission to His Father's will, learning of Him how to meet the troubles of life; for He was "meek and lowly in heart," content to be in the lowest place at the will of His God. In fact nothing can overthrow one who is there. It is the place of perfect rest to the heart.

**CHAPTER 12.** At length the rejection of the nation, in consequence of their contempt of the Lord, is plainly shown, as well as the cessation of all His relations with them as such, in order to bring out on God's part an entirely different system, that is to say, the kingdom in a particular form. Thus this last chapter is the great turning-point of the whole history. Christ is a divine witness to Himself, and John Baptist has so to receive Him, as another would. He stood no longer as Messiah witnessed to, but as Son of God, but gives His full testimony to John. But the nation had rejected God manifested in warnings and grace alike: only there was a remnant. Wisdom was justified of her children. Then comes His submission to His rejection, evil as it might be, as the Father's will; but this leads Him out into the consciousness of His personal glory, the real ground of that rejection. All things were delivered to Him of His Father. None could know Him, nor any the Father unless He revealed Him. The whole world, tested by His perfection, was found lying in wickedness (though with a spared remnant), but man was universally away from God. He looked down from heaven to see, as we read, but they were all gone out of the way, none righteous, no, not one. So Jesus, as He walked on the sea, stood alone in a judged world, judged by His rejection, but now in the sovereign grace of the Father, as

the Son revealing Him, and calling to the revelation of this grace in Himself. This is just now the new position. He had tried man. The very thing that He was, hindered their receiving Him. Now he that was weary must come to Him who stood thus alone, and He would give them rest. They must learn of Him who thus had absolutely submitted, and they would have rest as to the world and everything here. So with us: where we wholly bow, we come into the conscious possession of our privileges as disowned, on the heavenly and higher ground.

The first circumstance that brought forward the question of His Person, and of His right to close the dispensation, was the disciples' plucking the ears of corn and crushing them in their hands to satisfy their hunger. For this the Pharisees rebuke them, because it was on a Sabbath day. Jesus sets before them that the king, rejected by the malice of Saul, had partaken of that which was only given to the priests. The Son of David, in a similar case, might well enjoy a similar privilege. Besides God was acting in grace. The priest also profaned the Sabbath in the service of the temple; and One greater than the temple was there. Moreover, if they had really known the mind of God, if they had been imbued with the Spirit which His word declared to be acceptable to Him — "I will have mercy and not sacrifice," they would not have condemned the guiltless. In addition to this, the Son of man was Lord even of the Sabbath. Here He no longer takes the title of Messiah, but that of Son of man — a name which bore witness to a new order of things, and to a more extended power. Now that which He said had great significance; for the Sabbath was the token of the covenant between Jehovah and the nation (Ezekiel 20:12-20); and the Son of man was declaring His power over it. If that was touched, it was all over with the covenant.

The same question arises in the synagogue; and the Lord persists in acting in grace, and in doing good, showing them that they would do the same for one of their sheep. This only excites their hatred, great as was the proof of His beneficent power. They were children of the murderer. Jesus withdraws from them, and great multitudes follow Him. He heals them, charging them not to make Him known. In all this however His doings were but the fulfillment of a prophecy which clearly traces out the Lord's position at this time. The hour would come when He should bring forth judgment unto victory. Meanwhile He retained the position of entire

lowliness, in which grace and truth could commend themselves to those who appreciated and needed them. But in the exercise of this grace, and in His testimony to the truth, He would do nothing to falsify this character, or so to attract the attention of men as to prevent His true work, or which could make it even suspected that He sought His own honor. Nevertheless the Spirit of Jehovah was upon Him as His beloved, in whom His soul delighted; and He should declare judgment to the Gentiles, and they should put their trust in His name. The application of this prophecy to Jesus at that moment is very evident. We see how guarded He was with the Jews, abstaining from the gratification of their carnal desires respecting Himself, and content to be in the background, if God His Father was glorified; and glorifying Him perfectly Himself on the earth by doing good. He was soon to be declared to the Gentiles; whether by the execution of the judgment of God, or by presenting Himself to them as the One in whom they should trust.

This passage is manifestly placed here by the Holy Ghost, in order to give the exact representation of His position, before laying open the new scenes which His rejection prepares for us.

He then casts out a devil from a man who was blind and dumb — a sad condition, truly depicting that of the people with respect to God. The multitude, full of admiration, exclaim, “Is not this the Son of David?” But the religionists, on hearing it, jealous of the Lord, and hostile to the testimony of God, declare that Jesus wrought this miracle by the power of Beelzebub, thus sealing their own condition, and putting themselves under the definitive judgment of God. Jesus demonstrates the absurdity of what they had said. Satan would not destroy his own kingdom. Their own children, who had the pretension to do the same, should judge their iniquity. But if not the power of Satan (and the Pharisees admitted that the devils were really cast out), it was the finger of God, and the kingdom of God was among them.

He who had come into the strong man’s house to spoil his goods had first to bind him.

The truth is that the presence of Jesus put everything to the test; everything on God’s part was centered in Him. It is Emmanuel Himself who was there. He who was not with Him was against Him. He who did

not gather with Him scattered. Everything now depended on Him alone. He would bear with all unbelief as to His own Person. Grace could remove that. He could pardon all sin; but to speak against and blaspheme the Holy Ghost (that is, to acknowledge the exercise of a power, which is that of God, and to attribute it to Satan) could not be pardoned; for the Pharisees admitted that the devil was cast out, and it was only with malice, with open-eyed deliberate hatred to God, that they attributed it to Satan. And what pardon could there be for this? There was none either in the age of the law\* or in that of the Messiah. The fate of those who thus acted was decided. This the Lord would have them understand. The fruit proved the nature of the tree. It was essentially bad. They were a generation of vipers. John had told them the same. Their words condemned them. Upon this the scribes and Pharisees asked for a sign. This was nothing but wickedness. They had had signs enough. It was only stirring up the unbelief of the rest.

- [\* Take notice of this expression. We see the manner in which the Holy Ghost passes on from the time then present to the Jews, which would soon end, to the time when the Messiah would set up His kingdom, their “world age] to come.” We have a position outside all this, during the suspension of the public establishment of the kingdom. The apostles even did but preach or announce it; they did not establish it. Their miracles were “the powers of the age to come” (compare 1 Peter 1:11-13). This, as we shall see by-and-by, is of great importance. Thus also with regard to the new covenant, of which Paul was the minister; and yet he did not establish it with Judah and Israel.]

This request gives the Lord occasion to pronounce the judgment of this generation.

There should be only the sign of Jonah for this evil generation. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so should the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. But then lo! Christ was already rejected.

The Ninevites by their conduct should condemn this generation in the day of judgment, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and a greater than Jonah was here. The queen of the south likewise testified against the wickedness of this perverse generation. Her heart attracted by the report of Solomon’s wisdom, had led her to him from the uttermost parts of the earth; and a greater than Solomon was here. Poor ignorant Gentiles understood the wisdom of God in His word, whether by the prophet or

the king, better than His beloved people, even when the Great King and Prophet was among them.

This was then His judgment: the unclean spirit (of idolatry) which had gone out of the people, finding no rest away from Israel (alas! its true house, whereas they ought to have been the house of God), should return with seven spirits worse than itself. They would find the house empty, swept, and garnished; and the last state should be worse than the first. What a solemn judgment of the people was this — that those among whom Jehovah had walked should become the habitation of an unclean spirit, of a superabundance of unclean spirits; not merely of seven, the complete number, but together with these (who would incite them all to madness against God and those who honored God, thus leading them to their own destruction) that other unclean spirit also, who would draw them back into the wretched idolatry from which they had escaped! Israel's judgment was pronounced.

In conclusion Jesus publicly breaks the bonds that naturally existed between Himself and the people after the flesh, acknowledging those only which were formed by the word of God, and manifested by doing the will of His Father which was in heaven. Those persons only would He acknowledge as His relations, who were formed after the pattern of the sermon on the Mount.

His actions and His words after this bear witness to the new work which He was really doing on the earth. He leaves (chap. 13) the house and sits beside the lake. He takes a new position outside, to proclaim to the multitude that which was His true work. A sower went forth to sow.

The Lord was no longer seeking fruit in His vine. It had been requisite according to God's relations with Israel that He should seek this fruit; but His true service, He well knew, was to bring that which could produce fruit, and not to find any in men.

It is important to remark here, that the Lord speaks of the visible and outward effect of His work as a Sower. The only occasion here on which He expresses His judgment as to the inward cause is, when He says, "They had no root"; and even here it is a matter of fact. The doctrines respecting the divine operation needed for the production of fruit are not

here spoken of. It is the Sower who is displayed, and the result of His sowing, not that which causes the seed to germinate in the earth. In each case, except the first, a certain effect is produced.

The Lord is then here presented as commencing a work which is independent of all former relation between God and men, bearing with Him the seed of the word, which He sows in the heart by His ministry. Where it abides, where it is understood, where it is neither choked nor dried up, it produces fruit to His glory, and to the happiness and profit of the man who bears it.

In verse 11 the Lord shows the reason why He speaks enigmatically to the multitude. A distinction is now definitely made between the remnant and the nation: the latter was under the judgment of blindness pronounced by the prophet Isaiah. Blessed were the eyes of the disciples which saw the Emmanuel, the Messiah, the object of the hopes and desires of so many prophets and righteous men. All this marks judgment, and a called and spared remnant.\*

[\* Compare Mark 4:33, 34. It was adapted to all if they had ears to hear, but was darkness to the willful.]

I would now make a few remarks on the character of the persons of whom the Lord speaks in the parable.

When the word is sown in a heart that does not understand it, when it produces no relation of intelligence, of feeling, or of conscience between the heart and God, the enemy takes it away: it does not remain in the heart. He who heard it is not the less guilty: that which was sown in his heart was adapted to every need, to the nature and to the condition of man.

The immediate reception of the word with joy, in the next case, tends rather to prove that the heart will not retain it; for it is scarcely probable in such a case that the conscience was reached. A conscience touched by the word makes a man serious; he sees himself in the presence of God, which is always a serious thing whatever may be the attraction of His grace, or the hope inspired by His goodness. If the conscience has not been reached, there is no root. The word was received for the joy it imparted; when it brings tribulation, it is given up. When the conscience has been already exercised, the gospel brings at once joy; but when not, it awakens the



conscience where there is a real work. In the first case it is the answer to and meets the wants already there. In the second it creates those wants.

Every day's history is, alas! the sad and best explanation of the third class. There is no ill-will, there is barrenness.

That the word was understood is only affirmed of those who bear fruit. The true understanding of the word brings a soul into connection with God, because the word reveals God — expresses what He is. If I understand it, I know Him; and the true knowledge of God (that is, of the Father and of His Son Jesus Christ) is eternal life. Now, whatever may be the degree of light, it is always God thus revealed who is made known by the word that Jesus sows. Thus, being begotten of the word, we shall produce, in diverse measures, the fruits of the life of God in this world. For the subject here is the effect, in this world, of the reception of the truth brought by Jesus (not heaven, nor that which God does in the heart to make the seed bear fruit).

This parable does not speak, as a similitude, of the kingdom, though the word sown was the word of the kingdom, but of the great elementary principle of the service of Christ in the universality of its application, and as it was realised in His own Person and service while on the earth, and after He was gone, though fuller subjects of grace might then be brought out.

In the six following parables we find similitudes of the kingdom. We must remember that it is the kingdom established during the rejection of the King,\* and which consequently has a peculiar character. That is to say, it is characterised by the absence of the King, adding to this, in the explanation of the first parable, the effect of His return.

[\* Remark here, that chapter 12 having brought before us the judgment of the Jewish people, we have now the kingdom as It is in the absence of the king, chapter 13; the assembly as built by Christ, chapter 16; and the kingdom in glory, chapter 17.]

The first three of these six parables present the kingdom in its outward forms in the world. They are addressed to the multitude. The last three present the kingdom according to the estimate of the Holy Ghost, according to the reality of its character as seen by God — the mind and counsel of God in it. They are addressed consequently to the disciples

alone. The public establishment of the kingdom in the righteousness and power of God is also announced to the latter, in the explanation of the parables of the tares.

Let us consider first the exterior of the kingdom publicly announced to the multitude — the outward form which the kingdom would assume.

We must remember that the King, that is, the Lord Jesus, was rejected on earth; that the Jews, in rejecting Him, had condemned themselves; that, the word of God being used to accomplish the work of Him whom the Father had sent, the Lord thus made it known that He established the kingdom, not by His power exercised in righteousness and in judgment, but by bearing testimony to the hearts of men; and that the kingdom now assumed a character connected with man's responsibility, and with the result of the word of light being sown in the earth, addressed to the hearts of men, and left as a system of truth to the faithfulness and the care of men (God, however, still holding good His sovereign right for the preservation of His children and of the truth itself). This latter part is not the subject of these parables. I have introduced it here, because it might otherwise have been supposed that everything depended absolutely on man. Had it been so, alas! all would have been lost.

The parable of the tares is the first. It gives us a general idea of the effect of these sowings as to the kingdom; or rather, the result of having for the moment committed the kingdom here below to the hands of men.

The result was that the kingdom here below no longer presented as a whole the appearance of the Lord's own work. He sows not tares. Through the carelessness and the infirmity of men, the enemy found means to sow these tares. Observe that this does not apply to the heathen or to the Jews, but to the evil done among Christians by Satan through bad doctrines, bad teachers and their adherents. The Lord Jesus sowed. Satan, while men slept, sowed also. There were judaisers, philosophers, heretics who held with both the former on the one hand, or on the other opposed the truth of the Old Testament.

Nevertheless Christ had only sown good seed. Must the tares then be rooted out? Clearly the condition of the kingdom during the absence of Christ depends on the answer to this question; and it throws light also

upon that condition. But there was still less power to bring in a remedy than there had been to prevent the evil. All must remain unremedied until the King's interposition at the time of harvest. The kingdom of heaven on earth, such as it is in the hands of men, must remain a mingled system. Heretics, false brethren, will be there, as well as the fruit of the Lord's word, testifying, in this last dealing of God with him, man's inability to maintain that which is good and pure in its pristine state. So it has ever been.\*

[\* It is a solemn thought that the first act of man has been to spoil what God has set up good. So with Adam, so with Noah, so with the law, so with the priesthood of Aaron, so with the son of David, so even Nebuchadnezzar, so the church. In Paul's days all sought their own, not the things of Jesus Christ. All is made good, better, and stable in the Messiah.]

At the time of harvest (a phrase that designates a certain space of time during which the events connected with the harvest will take place)"at the time of harvest" the Lord will deal first, in His providence, with the tares. I say, "in His providence," because He employs the angels. The tares shall be bound in bundles ready to be burnt.

We must observe that outward things in the world are the subject here — acts which root out corruption — corruption that has grown up in the midst of Christianity.

The servants are not capable of doing this. The intermingling (caused by their weakness and carelessness) is such, that in gathering out the tares they would root up the wheat also. Not only discernment, but the practical power of separation would be wanting to carry out their purpose. When once the tares are there, the servants have nothing to do with them as to their presence in this world, in Christendom. Their service is with the good. The work of purging Christendom from them was not in their province. It is a work of judgment on that which is not of God, belonging to Him who can execute it according to the perfection of a knowledge that embraces everything, and a power that nothing escapes; which, if two men are in one bed, knows how to take the one and leave the other. The execution of judgment on the wicked in this world does not belong to the servants of Christ.\* He will accomplish it by the angels of His power, to whom He commits the execution of this work.

[\* I speak here of those who will have been His servants on earth during His absence. For angels are also His servants, as well as the saints of the age to come.]

After the binding of the tares He gathers the wheat into His garner. There is no binding the wheat in bundles; He takes it all to Himself. Such is the end of that which concerns the outward appearance of the kingdom here below. This is not all that the parable can teach us, but it ends the subject of which this part of the chapter speaks. During the absence of Jesus the result of His sowing will be marred, as a whole down here, by the work of the enemy. At the close He will bind all the enemy's work in bundles; that is, He will prepare them in this world for judgment. He will then take away the church. It is evident that this terminates the scene below which goes on during His absence. The judgment is not yet executed. Before speaking of it the Lord gives other pictures of the forms which the kingdom will assume during His absence.

That which had been sown as a grain of mustard-seed becomes a great tree; a symbol that represents a great power in the earth. The Assyrian, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, are set before us in the word as great trees. Such would be the form of the kingdom, which began in littleness through the word sown by the Lord, and afterwards by His disciples. That which this seed produced would gradually assume the form of a great power, making itself prominent on the earth, so that others would shelter themselves under it, as birds under the branches of a tree. This has, indeed, been the case.

We next find that it would not only be a great tree in the earth, but that the kingdom would be characterised as a system of doctrine, which would diffuse itself — a profession, which would enclose all it reached within its sphere of influence. The whole of the three measures would be leavened. I need not dwell here on the fact that the word leaven is always used in a bad sense by the sacred writers; but the Holy Ghost gives us to understand that it is not the regenerative power of the word in the heart of an individual, bringing him back to God; neither is it simply a power acting by outward strength, such as Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and the other great trees of scripture. But it is a system of doctrine that should characterise the mass, pervading it throughout. It is not faith properly so called, nor is it life. It is a religion; it is Christendom. A profession of

doctrine, in hearts which will bear neither the truth nor God, connects itself always with corruption in the doctrine itself.

This parable of the leaven concludes His instructions to the multitude. All was now addressed to them in parables, for they did not receive Him their King, and He spoke of things that supposed His rejection, and an aspect of the kingdom unknown to the revelations of the Old Testament, which have in view either the kingdom in power, or a little remnant receiving, amid sufferings, the word of the Prophet-King who had been rejected.

After this parable Jesus no longer remains by the seaside with the multitude — a place suited to the position in which He stood towards the people after the testimony born at the end of chapter 12, and whither He had repaired on quitting the house. He now re-enters the house with His disciples; and there, in secluded intimacy with them, He reveals the true character — the object — of the kingdom of heaven, the result of that which was done in it, and the means which should be taken to cleanse everything on earth, when the outward history of the kingdom during His absence should have terminated. That is to say, we find here that which characterises the kingdom to the spiritual man, that which he understands as the true mind of God with regard to the kingdom, and the judgment which should purge out from it all that was contrary to Him — the exercise of power which should render it outwardly in accordance with the heart of God.

We have seen its outward history ending with this, the wheat hidden in the garner, and the tares left in bundles on the earth ready to be burnt. The explanation of this parable resumes the history of the kingdom at that period; only it gives us to understand and distinguish the different parts of the intermixture, ascribing each part to its true author. The field is the world;\* there the word was sown for the establishment, in this manner, of the kingdom. The good seed were the children of the kingdom; they belonged to it really according to God; they are its heirs. The Jews were no longer so, and it was no longer the privilege of natural birth. The children of the kingdom were born of the word. But among these, in order to spoil the Lord's work, the enemy introduced all sorts of people, the fruit of the doctrines which he had sown among those who were born of the truth. This is the work of Satan in the place where the doctrine of Christ had

been planted. The harvest is the end of the age.\*\* The reapers are the angels. It will be remarked here that the Lord does not explain historically that which took place, but the terms used to bring in the issue when the harvest is come. The fulfillment of that which is historical in the parable is supposed; and He passes on to give the great result outside that which was the kingdom during His absence on high. The wheat (that is, the church) is in the barn, and the tares in bundles on the earth. But He takes all that constitutes these bundles, all that as evil offends God in the kingdom, and casts it into the furnace of fire, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth. After this judgment the righteous shall shine forth like Himself, the true Sun of that day of glory — of the age to come, in the kingdom of their Father. Christ will have received the kingdom from the Father whose children they were; and they shall shine forth in it with Him according to that character.

[\* Manifestly it was not in the church that the Lord began to sow: it did not then exist. But He distinguishes Israel here from the world, and speaks of the latter. He looked for fruit in Israel; He sows in the world, because Israel after all His culture brought forth no fruit.]

[\*\* Not merely the instant that terminates it, but the acts that accomplish the purpose of God in terminating it.]

Thus we find for the multitude, the results on earth of the divine sowing, and the machinations of the enemy — the kingdom presented under this form; afterwards the confederacies of the wicked among themselves apart from their natural order as growing in the field; and the taking away of the church. For His own disciples, the Lord explains all that was necessary to make them fully understand the language of the parable. We then find the judgment executed by the Son of man upon the wicked, who are cast into the fire; and the manifestation of the righteous in glory (these last events taking place after the Lord had risen up and put an end to the outward form of the kingdom of heaven upon earth, the wicked being gathered in companies, and the saints taken up to heaven).\*

[\* Remark too here that the kingdom of heaven is parcelled out into two parts, the kingdom of the Son of man, and the kingdom of our Father: the objects of judgment in what is subjected to Christ, and a place like His before the Father for sons.]

And now, having explained the public history and its results in judgment and in glory for the full instruction of His disciples, the Lord

communicates to them the thoughts of God with respect to what was going on upon earth, while the outward and earthly events of the kingdom were being developed — that which the spiritual man should discern in them. To him, to one who understood the purpose of God, the kingdom of heaven was like a treasure hidden in a field. A man finds the treasure, and buys the field in order to possess it. The field was not his object, but the treasure that was in it. Thus Christ has purchased the world. He possesses it by right. His object is the treasure hidden in it, His own people, all the glory of the redemption connected with it; in a word, the church looked at, not in its moral and in a certain sense divine beauty, but as the special object of the desires and of the sacrifice of the Lord — that which His heart had found in this world according to the counsels and the mind of God.

In this parable it is the powerful attraction of this “new thing,” which induces the one who has found it to purchase the whole place, that he may obtain possession of it.

The Jews were nothing new; the world had no attraction; but this new treasure induced the One who had discovered it to sell all He had that He might gain it. In fact Christ forsook everything. He not only emptied Himself to redeem us, but He renounced all that belonged to Him as man, as the Messiah on earth, the promises, His royal rights, His life, to take possession of the world which contained in it this treasure, the people whom He loved.

In the parable of the pearl of great price we have again the same idea, but it is modified by others. A man was seeking goodly pearls. He knew what he was about. He had taste, discernment, knowledge, as to that which he sought. It was the well-known beauty of the thing that caused his research. He knows when he has found one corresponding to his ideas, that it is worth while to sell all that he may acquire it. It is worth this in the eyes of one who can estimate its value. And he buys nothing else along with it. Thus Christ has found in the church by itself a beauty and (because of this beauty) a value, which made Him give up all to obtain it. It is just so with regard to the kingdom. Considering the state of man, of the Jews even, the glory of God required that all should be given up in order to have this new thing; for there was nothing in man that He could take to Himself. Not

only He was content to give up all for the possession of this new thing, but that which His heart seeks for, that which He finds nowhere else, He finds in that which God has given Him in the kingdom. He bought no other pearls. Until He found this pearl, He had no inducement to sell all that He had. As soon as He sees it, His mind is made up; He forsakes all for it. Its value decides Him, for He knows how to judge, and He seeks with discernment.

I do not say that the children of the kingdom are not actuated by the same principle. When we have learnt what it is to be a child of the kingdom, we forsake all that we may enjoy it, that we may be of the pearl of great price. But we do not buy that which is not the treasure, in order to obtain it; and we are very far from seeking goodly pearls before we have found the one of great price. In their full force these parables only apply to Christ. The intention in these parables is to bring out that which was then doing, in contrast with all that had taken place before — with the Lord's relations to the Jews.

There remains yet one of the seven — that of the net cast into the sea. In this parable there is no change in the persons employed, that is to say, in the parable itself. The same persons who cast the net draw it to shore, and make the separation by gathering the good fish into vessels, taking no further notice of the bad. Securing the good fish is the work of those who draw the net to shore. It is only when landed that this is done. The sorting is their work, doubtless; but they have only to do with the good fish. They know them. This is their business, the object of their fishing. Others indeed come, and are found in the net together with the good; but these are not good. No other judgment is needed. The fishermen know the good. These are not such. They leave them. This forms a part of the history of the kingdom of heaven. The judgment of the wicked is not found here. The bad are left on the shore, when the fishermen gather the good into vessels. The final destiny of either good or bad is not given here. It does not take place on the shore with respect to the good; nor as to the bad by simply leaving them there. It is subsequent to the action of the parable; and, with respect to the bad, it does not take place merely by their separation from the good with whom they had been intermingled, but by their destruction. Neither in this parable, nor in that of the tares and wheat, does the



execution of judgment form part of the parable itself. There the tares are bound and left on the field, here they are cast away out of the netful.

Thus the gospel net has been cast into the sea of the nations, and has enclosed of all kinds. After this general gathering, which has filled the net, the agents of the Lord, having to do with the good, gather them together, separating them from the bad. Remark here that this is a similitude of the kingdom. It is the character which the kingdom assumes when the gospel has assembled together a mass of good and bad. At the end, when the net has been drawn so that all kinds are enclosed in it, the good are set apart because they are precious, the others are left. The good are gathered into divers vessels. The saints are gathered, not by the angels, but by the work of those who have labored in the name of the Lord. The distinction is not made by judgment, but by the servants occupied with the good.

The execution of the judgment is another matter. The laborers have nothing to do with that. At the end of the age, the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, not the just from among the rest as the fisherman did, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire, where there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Here nothing is said of their being occupied about the just. Gathering them into vessels was not the angels' work, but that of the fishermen. The angels are in both parables occupied with the wicked. The public result had been given, whether during the period of the kingdom of heaven, or afterwards, in the parable of the tares. It is not repeated here. The work to be done with regard to the righteous when the net is full is added here. The destiny of the wicked is repeated to distinguish the work done with respect to them from that wrought by means of the fishermen, who gather the good into divers vessels. Still it is presented under another aspect; and the just are left where they were. In the parable of the tares the judgment of the wicked is declared as in this. They are cast out into weeping and gnashing of teeth, but there the general state of the kingdom is revealed, and we have the righteous shining forth as the sun — the higher part of the kingdom. Here it is only what the intelligent understand, what the spiritual mind sees; the just are put into vessels. There is a separation by spiritual power before judgment, which there was not in the general public state of the kingdom, but only what providence did publicly in the field, and the good grain received above. Here the separation is by dealings with the good. This was the main point

for spiritual intelligence. Public display is not the point; only judgment will be executed on the wicked, in fact; then the just will be left there.\*

[\* In all symbolical prophecies and parables, the explanation goes beyond the parable and adds facts; because the judgment executed publicly testifies of that which in the time of the parable can only be discerned spiritually. This latter may be spiritually understood. The result is, judgment will publicly declare it, so that we are always to go beyond the parable in the explanation. Judgment explains publicly what is only understood spiritually before, and brings in a new order of things (compare Daniel 7).]

In the explanation of the second parable, it is absolute judgment in the case of the tares, destroying and consuming that which remains on the field, already collected together and separated providentially from the wheat. The angels are sent at the end, not to separate the tares from the wheat (that was done) but to cast the tares into the fire, thus cleansing the kingdom. In the explanation of the parable of the fish (v. 49) the sorting itself takes place. There will be just ones on the earth, and the wicked will be separated from among them. The practical instruction of this parable is the separation of the good from the wicked, and the gathering together in companies of many of the former; this is done more than once, many others of the same being gathered elsewhere into one also. The servants of the Lord are the instruments employed in what takes place in the parable itself.

These parables contain things new and old. The doctrine of the kingdom, for instance, was a well-known doctrine. That the kingdom should take the forms described by the Lord, that it should embrace the whole world without distinction, the people of God drawing their existence not from Abraham but from the word — all this was quite new. All was of God. The scribe had knowledge of the kingdom, but was entirely ignorant of the character it would assume, as the kingdom of heaven planted in this world by means of the word, on which all here depends.

The Lord resumes His work among the Jews.\* To them He was only “the carpenter’s son.” They knew His family after the flesh. The kingdom of heaven was nothing in their eyes. The revelation of this kingdom was carried on elsewhere, and there the knowledge of divine things was communicated. The former saw nothing beyond those things which the natural heart could perceive. The blessing of the Lord was arrested by their unbelief: He was rejected as prophet, as well as king, by Israel.

[\* The chapters which follow are striking in their character. Christ's Person as the Jehovah of Psalm 132 is brought out, but Israel sent away, the disciples left alone, while He prays on high. He returns, rejoins the disciples, and the Gadarene world owns Him. Then we have in chapter 15 the full moral description of the ground on which Israel stood actually, and ought to stand, but carried much farther out into what man's heart is; and then what God is, revealed in grace to faith, even if in a Gentile. Historically He still owns Israel, but in divine perfection, and now in human administrative power; and then (chap. 16) the church is brought in prophetically; and in chapter 17 the kingdom of glory in vision. In chapter 16 they are forbidden to say He is the Christ. This is over.]

**CHAPTER 14.** Our Gospel resumes the historical course of these revelations, but in such a manner as to exhibit the spirit by which the people were animated. Herod (loving his earthly power and his own glory more than submission to the testimony of God, and more bound by a false human idea than by his conscience, although in many things he appears to have owned the power of the truth) had cut off the head of the forerunner of the Messiah, John the Baptist; whom he had already imprisoned, in order to remove out of the sight of his wife the faithful reprover of the sin in which she lived.

Jesus is sensible of the import of this, which is reported to Him. Accomplishing in lowly service (however personally exalted above him), together with John, the testimony of God in the congregation, He felt Himself united in heart and in His work to him; for faithfulness in the midst of all evil binds hearts very closely together; and Jesus had condescended to take a place in which faithfulness was concerned (see Psalm 40, 9, 10). On hearing therefore of John's death He retires into a desert place. But while departing from the multitude who thus began to act openly in the rejection of the testimony of God, He does not cease to be the supplier of all their wants, and to testify thus that He who could divinely minister to all their need was amongst them. For the multitude, who felt these wants and who, if they had not faith, yet admired the power of Jesus, follow Him into the desert place; and Jesus, moved with compassion, heals all their sick. In the evening His disciples beg Him to send the multitude away that they may procure food. He refuses and bears a remarkable testimony to the presence, in His own Person, of Him who was to satisfy the poor of His people with bread (Psalm 132). Jehovah, the Lord, who established the throne of David, was there in the Person of Him who should inherit that throne. I doubt not the twelve baskets of

fragments refer to the number which, in scripture, always designates the perfection of administrative power in man.

Remark also here, that the Lord expects to find His twelve disciples capable of being the instruments of His acts of blessing and power, administering according to His own power the blessings of the kingdom. "Give ye them," said He, "to eat." This applies to the blessing of the Lord's kingdom, and to the disciples of Jesus, the twelve, as being its ministers; but it is likewise an all-important principle with regard to the effect of faith in every intervention of God in grace. Faith should be able to use the power that acts in such intervention, to produce the works which are proper to that power, according to the order of the dispensation and the intelligence it has respecting it. We shall find this principle again elsewhere more fully developed.

The disciples wished to send the multitude away, not knowing how to use the power of Christ. They should have been able to avail themselves of it in Israel's behalf, according to the glory of Him who was among them.

If now the Lord demonstrated with perfect patience by His actions that He who could thus bless Israel was in the midst of His people, He does not the less bear testimony to His separation from that people in consequence of their unbelief. He makes His disciples get into a ship to cross the sea alone; and, dismissing the multitude Himself, He goes up into a mountain apart to pray; while the ship that contained the disciples was tossing on the waves of the sea with a contrary wind: a living picture of that which has taken place. God has indeed sent forth His people to cross the stormy sea of the world alone, meeting with an opposition against which it is hard to strive. Meanwhile Jesus prays alone on high. He has sent away the Jewish people, who had surrounded Him during the period of His presence here below. The departure of the disciples, besides its general character, sets before us peculiarly the Jewish remnant. Peter individually, in coming out of the ship, goes in figure beyond the position of this remnant. He represents that faith which, forsaking the earthly accommodation of the ship, goes out to meet Jesus who has revealed Himself to it, and walks upon the sea — a bold undertaking, but based on the word of Jesus, "Come." Yet remark here that this walk has no other foundation than, "If it be Thou," that is to say, Jesus Himself. There is no

support, no possibility of walking, if Christ be lost sight of. All depends on Him. There is a known means in the ship; there is nothing but faith, which looks to Jesus, for walking on the water. Man, as mere man, sinks by the very fact of being there. Nothing can sustain itself except that faith which draws from Jesus the strength that is in Him, and which therefore imitates Him. But it is sweet to imitate Him; and one is then nearer to Him, more like Him. This is the true position of the church, in contrast with the remnant in their ordinary character. Jesus walks on the water as on the solid ground. He who created the elements as they are could well dispose of their qualities at His pleasure. He permits storms to arise for the trial of our faith. He walks on the stormy wave as well as on the calm. Moreover the storm makes no difference. He who sinks in the waters does so in the calm as well as in the storm, and he who can walk upon them will do so in the storm as well as in the calm — that is to say, unless circumstances are looked to and so faith fail, and the Lord is forgotten. For often circumstances make us forget Him where faith ought to enable us to overcome circumstances through our walking by faith in Him who is above them all. Nevertheless, blessed be God! He who walks in His own power upon the water is there to sustain the faith and the wavering steps of the poor disciple; and at any rate that faith had brought Peter so near to Jesus that His outstretched hand could sustain him. Peter's fault was that he looked at the waves, at the storm (which, after all, had nothing to do with it), instead of looking at Jesus, who was unchanged, and who was walking on those very waves, as his faith should have observed. Still the cry of his distress brought the power of Jesus into action, as his faith ought to have done; only it was now to his shame, instead of being in the enjoyment of communion and walking like the Lord.

Jesus having entered the ship, the wind ceases. Even so it will be when Jesus returns to the remnant of His people in this world. Then also will He be worshipped as the Son of God by all that are in the ship, with the remnant of Israel. In Gennesaret Jesus again exercises the power which shall here after drive out from the earth all the evil that Satan has brought in. For when He returns, the world will recognise Him. It is a fine picture of the result of Christ's rejection, which this Gospel has already made known to us as taking place in the midst of the Jewish nation.

**CHAPTER 15** displays man and God, the moral contrast between the doctrine of Christ and that of the Jews; and thus the Jewish system is rejected morally by God. When I speak of the system, I speak of their whole moral condition, systematised by the hypocrisy that sought to conceal iniquity, while increasing it in the sight of God, before whom they presented themselves. They made use of His name in order to sink lower, under the pretense of piety, than the laws of natural conscience. It is thus that a religious system becomes the great instrument of the power of the enemy, and more especially when that, of which it still bears the name, was instituted by God. But then man is judged, for Judaism was man with God's law and God's culture.

The judgment which the Lord pronounces on this system of hypocrisy, while manifesting the consequent rejection of Israel, gives rise to instruction that goes thus much farther; and which, searching the heart of man, and judging man according to that which proceeds from it, proves the heart to be a spring of all iniquity; and thus makes it evident that all true morality has its basis in the conviction and confession of sin. For, without this, the heart is always false and flatters itself in vain. Thus also Jesus goes to the root of everything, and comes out of the special and temporary relations of the Jewish nation, to enter on the true morality which belongs to all ages. The disciples did not observe the traditions of the elders; about these the Lord did not concern Himself. He avails Himself of the accusation, to lay it upon the conscience of their accusers, that the judgment occasioned by the rejection of the Son of God was authorised also on the ground of those relationships that already existed between God and Israel. They made the commandment of God of none effect through their traditions; and that in a most important point, and one even on which all earthly blessings depended for the children of Israel. By their own ordinances also Jesus exposes the consummate hypocrisy, the selfishness and avarice, of those who pretended to guide the people, and to form their heart to morality and to the worship of Jehovah. Isaiah had already pronounced their judgment.

Afterwards He shows the multitude that it was a question of what man was, of what proceeded from his heart, from within him; and points out the sad streams that flow from that corrupt spring. But it was the simple truth with respect to the heart of man, as known by God, which

scandalised the self-righteous men of the world, which was unintelligible even to the disciples. Nothing so simple as the truth when it is known; nothing so difficult, so obscure, when a judgment is to be formed respecting it by the heart of man, who does not possess the truth; for he judges after his own thoughts, and the truth is not in them. In short, Israel, and specially religious Israel, and true morality are set in contrast: man is set in his proper responsibility, and in his real colors before God.

Jesus searches the heart; but, acting in grace, He acts according to the heart of God, and manifests it by coming out, both for the one and for the other, of the conventional terms of God's relationship with Israel. A divine Person, God, may walk in the covenant He has given, but cannot be confined to it. And the unfaithfulness of His people to it is the occasion of the revelation of Him passing out beyond that place. And note, here, the effect of traditional religion in blinding moral judgment. What clearer or plainer than that what came out of the mouth and heart defiled a man, not what he ate? But the disciples through the vile influence of Pharisaic teaching, putting outside forms for inward purity, could not understand it.

Christ now leaves the borders of Israel, and His disputes with the learned men of Jerusalem, to visit those places which were farthest off from Jewish privileges. He departs into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, the cities which He had Himself used as examples of that which was farthest from repentance; see chapter 11, where He classes them with Sodom and Gomorrah as more hardened than they. A woman comes out of these countries. She was one of the accursed race, according to the principles that distinguished Israel. She was a Canaanite. She comes to beg the interposition of Jesus on behalf of her daughter, who was possessed by a devil.

In begging this favor, she addresses Jesus by the title, which faith knew to be His connection with the Jews — "Son of David." This gives rise to a full development of the Lord's position, and, at the same time, of the conditions under which man might hope to share the effect of His goodness, yea, to the revelation of God Himself.

As the Son of David, He has nothing to do with a Canaanite. He makes her no answer. The disciples desired to get rid of her by granting her request, in order to have done with her importunity. The Lord answers them, that

He was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. This was indeed the truth. Whatever may have been the counsels of God manifested on occasion of His rejection (see Isaiah 49), He was the minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to fulfill His promises made to the fathers.

The woman, in more simple and direct language, the more natural expression of her feelings, begs for the merciful interposition of Him in whose power she trusted. The Lord answers her, that it is not meet to take the children's bread and give it to dogs. We see here His true position, as come to Israel; the promises were for the children of the kingdom. The Son of David was the minister of these promises. Could He as such blot out the distinction of the people of God?

But that faith which derives strength from necessity, and which finds no resource but in the Lord Himself, accepts the humiliation of its position, and deems that with Him there is bread for the hunger of those who have no right to it. It perseveres, too, because there is a felt want, and faith in the power of Him who is come in grace.

What had the Lord done by His apparent harshness? He had brought the poor woman to the expression, to the sense, of her real place before God, that is to say, to the truth as to herself. But, then, was it the truth to say that God was less good than she believed, less rich in mercy towards the destitute, whose only hope and trust was in that mercy? This would have been to deny the character and the nature of God, of which He was the expression, the truth, and the witness, on earth; it would have been to deny Himself, and the object of His mission. He could not say, "God has not a crumb for such." He answers, in fullness of heart, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." God comes out of the narrow limits of His covenant with the Jews, to act in His sovereign goodness according to His own nature. He comes out to be God in goodness, and not merely Jehovah in Israel.

But this goodness is exercised towards one who is brought, in the presence of that goodness, to know that she has no right to it. To this point the seeming harshness of the Lord had been leading her. She received all from grace, while in herself unworthy of all. It is thus, and thus only, that every soul obtains blessing. It is not merely the sense of need — the woman had



that from the beginning, it was that which brought her there. It is not sufficient merely to own that the Lord Jesus can meet that need — the woman came with that acknowledgment; we must be in the presence of the only source of blessing, and be brought to feel that, although we are there, we have no right to avail ourselves of it. And this is a terrible position. When it comes to this, all is grace. God can then act according to His own goodness, and He answers every desire which the heart can form for its happiness.

Thus we see Christ here as a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to fulfill the promises made to the fathers, and that the Gentiles also might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written. At the same time this last truth makes manifest the real condition of man, and the full and perfect grace of God. On this He acts, while still faithful to His promises; and the wisdom of God is displayed in a manner that calls forth our admiration.

We see how much the introduction, in this place, of the story of the Syro-Phenician woman develops and illustrates this part of our Gospel. The beginning of the chapter shows forth the moral condition of the Jews, the falseness of Pharisaic and sacerdotal religiousness; brings out the real state of man as man, what the heart of man was the source of; and then reveals the heart of God as manifested in Jesus. His dealings with this woman display the faithfulness of God to His promises; and the blessing finally granted exhibits the full grace of God, in connection with the manifestation of the real condition of man, acknowledged by conscience — grace rising above the curse which lay upon the object of this grace — rising above everything to make itself a way to the need which faith presented to it.

The Lord now departs thence and goes into Galilee, the place where He was in connection with the despised remnant of the Jews. It was neither Zion, nor the temple, nor Jerusalem, but the poor of the flock, where the people were sitting in gross darkness (Isaiah 8, 9). Thither His compassions follow this poor remnant, and are again exercised in their behalf. He renews the evidences, not only of His tender mercies, but of His presence who satisfied the poor of His people with bread. Here however it is not in the administrative power which He could bestow on His disciples, but according to His own perfection and acting from Himself. He

provides for the remnant of His people. Accordingly it is the fullness of seven baskets of fragments that is gathered up. He departs also without anything else taking place.

We have seen eternal morality, and truth in the inward parts, substituted for the hypocrisy of forms, man's use of legal religion and man's heart shown to be a source of evil and nought else, God's heart fully revealed that rises above all dispensation to show full grace in Christ. Thus dispensations are set aside though fully owned, and man and God fully shown out in doing so. It is a wonderful chapter as to what is everlasting in truth as to God, and as to what the revelation of God shows man to be. And this, note, gives occasion to the revelation of the assembly in the next chapter, which is not a dispensation but founded on what Christ is, Son of the living God. In chapter 12 Christ was dispensationally rejected, and the kingdom of heaven substituted in chapter 13. Here man is set aside and what he had made of law, and God acts in His own grace above all dispensations. Then come the assembly and the kingdom in glory.

**CHAPTER 16** goes farther than the revelation of the simple grace of God. Jesus reveals what was about to be formed in the counsels of that grace, where He was owned, showing the rejection of the proud among His people, that He abhors them as they abhor Him. (Zechariah 11). Shutting their eyes (through perversity of will) to the marvelous and beneficent signs of His power, which He constantly bestowed on the poor who sought Him, the Pharisees and Sadducees — struck with these manifestations, yet unbelieving in heart and will — demand a sign from heaven. He rebukes them for their unbelief, showing them that they knew how to discern the signs of the weather; yet the signs of the times were far more striking. They were the adulterous and wicked generation, and He leaves them: significant expressions of what was now passing in Israel.

He warns His forgetful disciples against the devices of these subtle adversaries to the truth, and to Him whom God had sent to reveal it. Israel is abandoned, as a nation, in the persons of their leaders. At the same time in patient grace He recalls His disciples to the remembrance of what explained His words to them.

Afterwards He questions His disciples as to what men in general said of Him. It was all matter of opinion, not of faith; that is, the uncertainty that

belongs to moral indifference, to the absence of that conscious need of soul which can rest only in the truth, in the Savior one has found. He then inquires what they themselves said of Him. Peter, to whom the Father had deigned to reveal Him, declares his faith, saying, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." No uncertainty, no mere opinion is here, but the powerful effect of the revelation, made by the Father Himself, of the Person of Christ, to the disciple whom He had elected for this privilege.

Here the condition of the people displays itself in a remarkable manner, not, as in the preceding chapter, with respect to the law, but with respect to Christ, who had been presented to them. We see it in contrast with the revelation of His glory to those who followed Him. We have thus three classes: first, haughty unbelieving Pharisees; next, persons conscious and owning there was divine power and authority in Christ, but indifferent; lastly, the revelation of God and divinely given faith.

In the fifteenth chapter, grace towards one who had no hope but in it, is put in contrast with disobedience to and hypocritical perversion of the law, by which the scribes and Pharisees sought to cover their disobedience with the pretense of piety.

The sixteenth chapter, judging the unbelief of the Pharisees respecting the Person of Christ, and setting aside these perverse men, brings in the revelation of His Person as the foundation of the assembly, which was to take the place of the Jews as the witness for God in the earth; and announces the counsels of God with respect to its establishment. It shows us, in adjunction to this, the administration of the kingdom, as it was now being established on the earth.

Let us consider, first, the revelation of His Person.

Peter confesses Him to be the Christ, the fulfillment of the promises made by God, and of the prophecies that announced their realisation. He was the One who should come, the Messiah whom God had promised.

Moreover, He was the Son of God. The second Psalm had declared that, in spite of the schemings of the leaders of the people, and the haughty animosity of the kings of the earth, God's King should be anointed on the hill of Zion. He was the Son, begotten of God. The kings and judges of the earth\* are called to submit themselves to Him, lest they should be smitten

with the rod of His power, when He takes the heathen for His inheritance. Thus the true believer waited for the Son of God born in due time upon this earth. Peter confessed Jesus to be the Son of God. So had Nathanael also: “Thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel.” And, still later, Martha did the same.

[\* The study of the Psalms will have made us understand that this is the connection with the establishment of the Jewish remnant in blessing in the last days.]

Peter however, especially taught of the Father, adds to his confession a word simple, yet full of power: “Thou art the Son of the living God.” Not only He who fulfills the promises, and answers to the prophecies; it is of the living God that He is the Son, of Him in whom is life and life-giving power.

He inherits that power of life in God which nothing can overcome or destroy. Who can vanquish the power of Him — of this Son — who came forth from “Him that liveth”? Satan has the power of death; it is he who holds man under the dominion of this dreadful consequence of sin; and that, by the just judgment of God which constitutes its power. The expression “The gates of hades,” of the invisible world, refers to this kingdom of Satan. It is then on this power, which leaves the stronghold of the enemy without strength, that the assembly is built. The life of God shall not be destroyed. The Son of the living God shall not be overcome. That; then, which God founds upon this rock of the unchangeable power of life in His Son shall not be overthrown by the kingdom of death. If man has been overcome and has fallen under the power of this kingdom, God, the living God, will not be overcome by it. It is on this that Christ builds His assembly. It is the work of Christ based on Him as Son of the living God, not of the first Adam nor based on him — His work accomplished according to the power which this truth reveals. The Person of Jesus, the Son of the living God, is its strength. It is the resurrection that proved it. There He is declared to be the Son of God with power. Accordingly it is not during His life, but when raised from the dead, that He begins this work. Life was in Himself; but it is after the Father had burst the gates of hades, that He Himself in His divine power had done so and was risen — that He begins to build by the Holy Ghost as ascended on high, that which the power of death or of him who wielded it — already overcome — can

never destroy. It is His Person that is here contemplated, and it is on His Person that all is founded. The resurrection is the proof that He is the Son of the living God, and that the gates of hades can do nothing against Him; their power is destroyed by it. Hence we see how the assembly (though formed on earth) is much more than a dispensation, the kingdom is not.

The work of the cross was needed; but it is not the question here of that which the righteous judgment of God required, or of the justification of an individual, but of that which nullified the power of the enemy. It was the Person of Him whom Peter was given to acknowledge, who lived according to the power of the life of God. It was a peculiar and direct revelation from heaven by the Father. Doubtless Christ had given proofs enough of who He was; but proofs had proved nothing to man's heart. The Father's revelation was the way of knowing who He was, and this went far beyond the hopes of a Messiah.

Here, then, the Father had directly revealed the truth of Christ's own Person, a revelation which went beyond all question of relationship with the Jews. On this foundation Christ would build His assembly. Peter, already so named by the Lord, receives a confirmation of that title on this occasion. The Father had revealed to Simon, the son of Jonas, the mystery of the Person of Jesus; and secondly, Jesus also betokens, by the name He gives him,\* the steadfastness, the firmness, the durability, the practical strength, of His servant favored by grace. The right of bestowing a name belongs to a superior, who can assign to the one who bears it his place and his name, in the family or the situation he is in. This right, where real, supposes discernment, intelligence, in that which is going on. Adam names the animals. Nebuchadnezzar gives new names to the captive Jews; the king of Egypt to Eliakim, whom he had placed on the throne. Jesus therefore takes this place when He says, The Father hath revealed this unto thee; and I also give you a place and a name connected with this grace. It is on that which the Father hath revealed unto thee that I am going to build My assembly,\*\* against which (founded on the life that comes from God) the gates of the kingdom of death shall never prevail; and I who build, and build on this immovable foundation — I give you the place of a stone (Peter) in connection with this living temple. Through the gift of God thou belongest already by nature to the building — a living stone, having the knowledge of that truth which is the foundation, and which

makes of every stone a part of the edifice. Peter was pre-eminently such by this confession; he was so in anticipation by the election of God. This revelation was made by the Father in sovereignty. The Lord assigns him, withal, his place, as possessing the right of administration and authority in the kingdom He was going to establish.

[\* The passage (chap. 16:18) should be read, "And I also say unto thee."

[\*\* It is important here to distinguish the church which Christ builds, not yet finished, but which He Himself builds, and that which is, as a manifested whole in the world, built up in responsibility by man. In Ephesians 2:20, 21 and 1 Peter 2:4, 5, we have this divine building growing and built up. No mention of man's work is found in either passage; it is a divine one. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul is a wise master builder; others may build in wood, hay and stubble. The confusion of these has been the basis of Popery and other corruptions found in what is called the church. His church, looked at in its reality, is a divine work which Christ accomplishes and which abides.]

Thus far with respect to the assembly, now mentioned for the first time, the Jews having been rejected because of their unbelief, and man a convicted sinner.

Another subject presents itself in connection with this of the assembly that the Lord was going to build; namely, the kingdom which was going to be established. It was to have the form of the kingdom of heaven; it was so in the counsels of God; but it was now to be set up in a peculiar manner, the King having been rejected on earth.

But, rejected as He was, the keys of the kingdom were in the Lord's hand; its authority belonged to Him. He would bestow them on Peter, who, when He was gone, should open its doors to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles. He should also exercise authority from the Lord within the kingdom; so that whatsoever he bound on earth in the name of Christ (the true King, although gone up to heaven) should be bound in heaven; and if he loosed anything on earth, his deed should be ratified in heaven. In a word, he had the power of command in the kingdom of God on earth, this kingdom having now the character of kingdom of heaven, because its King was in heaven\* and heaven would stamp his acts with its authority. But it is heaven sanctioning his earthly acts, not his binding or loosing for heaven. The assembly connected with the character of Son of the living God and built by Christ, though formed on earth, belongs to heaven; the kingdom,

though governed from heaven, belongs to earth — has its place and ministration there.

[\* Remark here what I have spoken of elsewhere — there are no keys of or to the church or assembly. Peter had the keys of administration in the kingdom. But the idea of keys in connection with the church, or the power of the keys in the church, is a pure fallacy. There are none such at all. The church is built; men do not build with keys, and it is Christ (not Peter) who builds it. Further, the acts thus sanctioned were acts of administration down here. Heaven puts its sanction on them, but they did not relate to heaven, but to earthly administration of the kingdom. Further, it is to be remarked that what is conferred here is individual and personal. It was a name and authority conferred on Simon, son of Jonas. Some further remarks here may help us to understand more fully the bearing of these chapters. In the parable of the sower (chap. 13) the Person of the Lord is not brought forward, only that it is sowing, not reaping. In the first similitude of the kingdom He is Son of man, and the field is the world. He is quite out of Judaism. In chapter 14 we have the state of things from John's rejection, to the time the Lord is owned on His return where He had been rejected. In chapter 15 is the moral controversy, and God in grace in Himself as above evil. On this I dwell no further. But in chapter 16 we have the Person of the Son of God, the living God, and hereon the assembly, and Christ the builder; in chapter 17 the kingdom with the Son of man coming in glory. The keys (however heaven sanctioned Simon's use of them) were, as we have seen, of the kingdom of heaven (not of the assembly); and that, the parable of the tares shows, was to be corrupted and spoiled, and this irremediably. Christ builds the church, not Peter. Compare 1 Peter 2:4, 5.]

These four things then are declared by the Lord in this passage: First, the revelation made by the Father to Simon; Second, the name given to this Simon by Jesus, who was going to build His assembly on the foundation revealed in that which the Father had made known to Simon; Third, the assembly built by Christ Himself, not yet complete, on the foundation of the Person of Jesus acknowledged as Son of the living God; Fourth, the keys of the kingdom that should be given to Peter, that is to say, authority in the kingdom as administering it on the part of Christ, ordering in it that which was His will, and which should be ratified in heaven. All this is connected with Simon personally, in virtue of the Father's election (who, in His wisdom, had chosen him to receive this revelation), and of Christ's authority (who had bestowed on him the name that distinguished him as personally enjoying this privilege).

The Lord having thus made known the purposes of God with regard to the future — purposes to be accomplished in the assembly and in the kingdom, there was no longer room for His presentation to the Jews as

Messiah. Not that He gave up the testimony, full of grace and patience towards the people, which He had born throughout His ministry. No; that indeed continued, but His disciples were to understand that it was no longer their work to proclaim Him to the people as the Christ. From this time also He began to teach His disciples that He must suffer and be killed and be raised again.

But, blessed and honored as Peter was by the revelation which the Father had made to him, his heart still clung in a carnal manner to the human glory of his Master (in truth, to his own), and was still far from rising to the height of the thoughts of God. Alas! he is not the only instance of this. To be convinced of the most exalted truths, and even to enjoy them sincerely as truths, is a different thing from having the heart formed to the sentiments, and to the walk here below, which are in accordance with those truths. It is not sincerity in the enjoyment of the truth that is wanting. What is wanting is to have the flesh, self, mortified — to be dead to the world. We may sincerely enjoy the truth as taught of God and yet not have the flesh mortified or the heart in a state which is according to that truth in what it involves down here. Peter (so lately honored by the revelation of the glory of Jesus, and made in a very special manner the depositary of administration in the kingdom given to the Son — having a distinguished place in that which was to follow the Lord's rejection by the Jews) is now doing the adversary's work with respect to the perfect submission of Jesus to the suffering and ignominy that were to introduce this glory and characterise the kingdom. Alas! the case was plain; he savored the things of men, and not the things of God. But the Lord, in faithfulness, rejects Peter in this matter, and teaches His disciples that the only path, the appointed and necessary path, is the cross; if any one would follow Him, that is the path He took. Moreover what would it profit a man to save his life and lose all — to gain the world and lose his soul? For this was the question,\* and not now the outward glory of the kingdom.

[\* In the Epistle of Peter we continually find these same thoughts — the words, “living hope,” “living stone” — applied to Christ, and afterwards to Christians. And again, in accordance with our present subject, salvation through life in Christ, the Son of the living God, we find “receiving the end of our faith, even the salvation of our] souls.” We may read all the verses by which the apostle introduces his instructions.]



Having examined this chapter, as the expression of the transition from the Messianic system to the establishment of the assembly founded on the revelation of the Person of Christ, I desire also to call attention to the characters of unbelief which are developed in it, both among the Jews and in the hearts of the disciples. It will be profitable to observe the forms of this unbelief.

First of all, it takes the grosser form of asking a sign from heaven. The Pharisees and Sadducees unite to show their insensibility to all that the Lord had done. They require proof to their natural senses, that is, to their unbelief. They will not believe God, either in hearkening to His words or in beholding His works. God must satisfy their willfulness, which would be neither faith nor the work of God. They had understanding for human things that were much less clearly manifested, but none for the things of God. A Savior lost to them, as Jews on earth, should be the only sign granted them. They would have to submit, willing or not, to the judgment of the unbelief they displayed. The kingdom should be taken from them; the Lord leaves them. The sign of Jonah is connected with the subject of the whole chapter.

We next see this same inattention to the power manifested in the works of Jesus; but it is no longer the opposition of the unbelieving will; occupation of heart with present things withdraws such from the influence of the signs already given. This is weakness, not ill-will. Nevertheless they are guilty; but Jesus calls them “men of little faith,” not “hypocrites,” and “a wicked and adulterous generation.”

We then see unbelief manifesting itself in the form of indolent opinion, which proves that the heart and conscience are not interested in a subject that ought to command them — a subject that if the heart would really face its true importance, it would have no rest until it had arrived at certainty with respect to it. The soul here has no sense of need; consequently there is no discernment. When the soul feels this need, there is but one thing that can meet it; there can be no rest till it is found. The revelation of God that created this need, does not leave the soul in peace until it is assured of possessing that which awakened it. Those who are not sensible of this need can rest in probabilities, each according to his natural character, his education, his circumstances. There is enough to awaken curiosity — the

mind is occupied about it, and judges. Faith has wants, and, in principle intelligence as to the object which meets those wants; the soul is exercised till it finds that which it needs. The fact is that God is there.

This is Peter's case. The Father reveals His Son to him Though weak, living faith was found in him, we see the condition of his soul when he says, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Happy the man to whom God reveals such truths as these, in whom He awakens these wants! There may be conflict, much to learn, much to mortify; but the counsel of God is there, and the life connected with it. We have seen its effect in the case of Peter. Every Christian has his own place in the temple of which Simon was so eminent a stone. Does it then follow that the heart is, practically, at the height of the revelation made to it? No; there may be, after all, the flesh not yet mortified on that side where the revelation touches our earthly position.

In fact the revelation made to Peter implied the rejection of Christ on earth — necessarily led to His humiliation and death. That was the point. To substitute the revelation of the Son of God, the assembly and the heavenly kingdom, for the manifestation of the Messiah on earth — what could it mean, except that Jesus was to be delivered up to the Gentiles to be crucified, and after that to rise again? But morally Peter had not attained to this. On the contrary, his carnal heart availed itself of the revelation made to him, and of that which Jesus had said to him, for self-exaltation. He saw, therefore, the personal glory without apprehending the practical moral consequences. He begins to rebuke the Lord Himself, and seeks to turn Him aside from the path of obedience and submission. The Lord, ever faithful, treats him as an adversary. Alas! how often have we enjoyed some truth, and that sincerely, and yet have failed in the practical consequences that it led to on earth! A heavenly glorified Savior, who builds the assembly, implies the cross on earth. The flesh does not understand this. It will raise its Messiah to heaven, if you will; but to take its share of the humiliation that necessarily follows is not its idea of a glorified Messiah. The flesh must be mortified to take this place. We must have the strength of Christ by the Holy Ghost. A Christian who is not dead to the world is but a stumbling-stone to every one who seeks to follow Christ.

These are the forms of unbelief that precede a true confession of Christ, and that are found alas! in those who have sincerely confessed and known Him (the flesh not being so mortified that the soul can walk in the height of that which it has learnt of God, and the spiritual understanding being obscured by thinking of consequences which the flesh rejects).

But if the cross was the entrance into the kingdom, the revelation of the glory would not be delayed. The Messiah being rejected by the Jews, a title more glorious and of far deeper import is unfolded: the Son of man should come in the glory of the Father (for He was the Son of God), and reward every man according to his works. There were even some standing there who should not taste of death (for of this they were speaking) till they had seen the manifestation of the glory of the kingdom that belonged to the Son of man.

We may remark here the title of “Son of God” established as the foundation; that of Messiah given up so far as concerned the testimony rendered in that day, and replaced by that of “Son of man,” which He takes at the same time as that of the Son of God, and which had a glory that belonged to Him in His own right. He was to come in the glory of His Father as Son of God, and in His own kingdom as Son of man.

It is interesting to remember here the instruction given us in the beginning of the Book of Psalms. The righteous man, distinguished from the congregation of the wicked, had been presented in the first Psalm. Then, in the second, we have the rebellion of the kings of the earth and the rulers against the Lord and against His Anointed (that is, His Christ). Now upon this the decree of Jehovah is declared. Adonai, the Lord, shall mock at them from heaven. Further, Jehovah’s King shall be established on Mount Zion. This is the decree: “Jehovah hath said unto me, Thou art my Son: this day\* have I begotten thee.” The kings of the earth and the judges are commanded to kiss the Son.

[\* We have seen that Peter went beyond this. Christ is here seen as the Son born on the earth in time, not as the Son from eternity in the bosom of the Father. Peter, without the full revelation of this last truth, sees Him to be the Son according to the power of divine life in His own Person, upon which the assembly consequently could be built. But here we are to consider that which belongs to the kingdom.]

Now in the Psalms that follow, all this glory is darkened. The distress of the remnant, in which Christ has a part, is related. Then, in Psalm 8, He is addressed as Son of man, Heir of all the rights conferred in sovereignty upon man by the counsels of God. The name of Jehovah becomes excellent in all the earth. These Psalms do not go beyond the earthly part of these truths, excepting where it is written, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh at them"; while in Matthew 16 the connection of the Son of God with this, His coming with His angels (to say nothing of the assembly), are set before us. That is to say, we see that the Son of man will come in the glory of heaven. Not that His dwelling there is the truth declared; but that He is invested with the highest glory of heaven when He comes to set up His kingdom on earth. He comes in His kingdom. The kingdom is established on the earth; but He comes to take it with the glory of heaven. This is displayed in the following chapter, according to the promise here in verse 28.

In each Gospel that speaks of it, the transfiguration immediately follows the promise of not tasting death before seeing the kingdom of the Son of man. And not only so, but Peter (in his second Epistle, 1:16), when speaking of this scene, declares that it was a manifestation of the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He says that the word of prophecy was confirmed to them by the view of His majesty; so that they knew that whereof they spoke, in making known to them the power and the coming of Christ, having beheld His majesty. In fact it is precisely in this sense that the Lord speaks of it here, as we have seen. It was a sample of the glory in which He would hereafter come, given to confirm the faith of His disciples in the prospect of His death which He had just announced to them.

In **CHAPTER 17** Jesus leads them up into a high mountain, and there is transfigured before them: "His face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." Moses and Elias appeared also, talking with Him. I leave the subject of their discourse, which is deeply interesting, till we come to the Gospel of Luke, who adds a few other circumstances, which, in some respects, give another aspect to this scene.

Here the Lord appears in glory, and Moses and Elias with Him: the one the legislator of the Jews; the other (almost equally distinguished) the

prophet who sought to bring back the ten apostate tribes to the worship of Jehovah, and who, despairing of the people, went back to Horeb, whence the law was given, and afterwards was taken up to heaven without passing through death.

These two persons, pre-eminently illustrious in the dealings of God with Israel, as the founder and the restorer of the people in connection with the law, appear in company with Jesus. Peter (struck with this apparition, rejoicing to see his Master associated with these pillars of the Jewish system, with such eminent servants of God, ignorant of the glory of the Son of man, and forgetting the revelation of the glory of His Person as the Son of God) desires to make three tabernacles, and to place the three on the same level as oracles. But the glory of God manifests itself; that is to say, the sign known in Israel as the abode (shechinah) of that glory;\* and the voice of the Father is heard. Grace may put Moses and Elias in the same glory as that of the Son of God, and associate them with Him; but if the folly of man, in his ignorance, would place them together as having in themselves equal authority over the heart of the believer, the Father must at once vindicate the rights of His Son. Not a moment elapses before the Father's voice proclaims the glory of the Person of His Son, His relation to Himself, that He is the object of His entire affection, in whom is all His delight. It is He whom the disciples are to hear. Moses and Elias have disappeared. Christ is there alone, as the One to be glorified, the One to teach those who hear the Father's voice. The Father Himself distinguishes Him, presents Him to the notice of the disciples, not as being worthy of their love, but as the object of His own delight. In Jesus He was Himself well pleased. Thus the Father's affections are presented as ruling ours — setting before us one common object. What a position for poor creatures like us! What grace!\*\*

[\* Peter, taught of the Holy Ghost, calls it “the excellent glory.”

[\*\* It was not in connection with the divine validity of their testimony, that Moses and Elias disappear. There could not be a stronger confirmation of it, as indeed Peter says, than this scene. But not only they were not the subjects of God's testimony as Christ was, but their testimony did not refer nor their exhortations reach to the heavenly things which were now to be revealed in association with the Son from heaven. Even John the Baptist makes this difference (John 3:13, 31-34). Hence as there set forth, the Son of man must be lifted up. So here, the Lord charges the disciples not to say He was the Messiah, for the Son of man must suffer. It was the

turning-point of the Lord's life and ministry, and the coming glory of the kingdom shown to the disciples, but then He must suffer (see John 12:27). The Jewish history was closed in chapter 12, indeed in chapter 11, and the ground of the change laid John and He both rejected, perfect submission, then all things delivered unto Him of His Father, and He revealing the Father (compare John 13, 14). But Matthew 13 — apart from Judaism, He begins with what He brought, not looking for fruit in man.]

At the same time the law, and all idea of the restoration of the law under the old covenant, were passed away; and Jesus, glorified as Son of man, and Son of the living God, remains the sole dispenser of the knowledge and the mind of God. The disciples fall on their faces, sore afraid, on hearing the voice of God. Jesus, to whom this glory and this voice were natural, encourages them, as He always did when on earth, saying, "Be not afraid." Being with Him who was the object of the Father's love, why should they fear? Their best Friend was the manifestation of God on the earth; the glory belonged to Him. Moses and Elias had disappeared, and the glory also, which the disciples were not yet able to bear; Jesus — who had been thus manifested to them in the glory given Him, and in the rights of His glorious Person, in His relations with the Father — Jesus remains the same to them as they had ever known Him. But this glory was not to be the subject of their testimony until He, the Son of man, was risen from the dead — the suffering Son of man. The great proof should then be given, that He was the Son of God with power. Testimony thereunto should be rendered, and He would ascend personally into that glory which had just shone forth before their eyes.

But a difficulty arises in the minds of the disciples caused by the doctrine of the scribes with regard to Elias. These had said that Elias must come before the manifestation of the Messiah; and in fact the prophecy of Malachi authorised this expectation. Why then, ask they, say the scribes that Elias must first come? (that is to say, before the manifestation of the Messiah); whereas we have now seen that Thou art He, without the coming of Elias. Jesus confirms the words of the prophecy, adding, that Elias should restore all things. "But," continues the Lord, "I say unto you, that he is come already, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed; likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them." Then understood they that He spoke of John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and power of Elias, as the Holy Ghost had declared by Zacharias his father.

Let us say a few words on this passage. First of all, when the Lord says, “Elias truly cometh first, and shall restore all things,” He does but confirm that which the scribes had spoken, according to Malachi’s prophecy, as though He had said, “They are in the right.” He then declares the effect of the coming of Elias: “He shall restore all things.” But the Son of man was yet to come. Jesus had said to His disciples, “Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come.” Nevertheless He had come, and was even now speaking with them. But this coming of the Son of man of which He spoke, is His coming in glory, when He shall be manifested as the Son of man in judgment according to Daniel 7. It was thus that all which had been said to the Jews should be accomplished; and in Matthew’s Gospel He speaks to them in connection with this expectation. Nevertheless it was needful that Jesus should be presented to the nation and should suffer. It was needful that the nation should be tested by the presentation of the Messiah according to the promise. This was done, and as God had also foretold by the prophets, “He was rejected of men.” Thus also John went before Him, according to Isaiah 40, as the voice in the wilderness, even in the spirit and power of Elias; he was rejected as the Son of man should also be.\*

[\* Hence also John Baptist rejects the application of Malachi 4:5, 6, to himself; while Isaiah 40 and Malachi 3:1 are applied to him in Luke 1:76; 7:27.]

The Lord then, by these words, declares to His disciples, in connection with the scene they had just left, and with all this part of our Gospel, that the Son of man, as now presented to the Jews, was to be rejected. This same Son of man was to be manifested in glory, as they had seen for a moment on the Mount. Elias indeed was to come, as the scribes had said; but that John the Baptist had fulfilled that office in power for this presentation of the Son of man; which (the Jews being left, as was fitting, to their own responsibility) would only end in His rejection, and in the setting aside of the nation until the days in which God would begin again to connect Himself with His people, still dear to Him, whatever their condition might be. He would then restore all things (a glorious work, which He would accomplish by bringing again His Firstborn into the world). The expression “restore all things” refers here to the Jews, and is used morally. In Acts 3 it refers to the effect of the Son of man’s own presence.

The temporary presence of the Son of man was the moment in which a work was accomplished on which eternal glory depends, in which God has been fully glorified, above and beyond all dispensation and in which God and so man has been revealed, a work of which even the outward glory of the Son of man is but the fruit, so far as that depends on His work, and not on His divine Person; a work in which morally He was perfectly glorified in perfectly glorifying God. Still, with respect to the promises made to the Jews, it was but the last step in the testing to which they were subjected by grace. God well knew that they would reject His Son; but He would not hold them as definitively guilty until they had really done it. Thus in His divine wisdom (while afterwards fulfilling His unchangeable promises) He presents Jesus to them — His Son, their Messiah. He gives them every necessary proof. He sends them John the Baptist in the spirit and power of Elias, as His forerunner. The Son of David is born at Bethlehem with all the signs that should have convinced them; but they were blinded by their pride and self-righteousness, and rejected it all. Nevertheless it became Jesus in grace to adapt Himself, as to His position, to the wretched condition of His people. Thus also, the Antitype of the David rejected in his day, He shared the affliction of His people. If the Gentiles oppressed them, their King must be associated with their distress, while giving every proof of what He was and seeking them in love. He rejected, all becomes pure grace. They have no longer a right to anything according to the promises, and are reduced to receive all from that grace, even as a poor Gentile would do. God will not fail in grace. Thus God has put them on the true footing of sinners, and will nevertheless fulfill His promises. This is the subject of Romans 11.

Now the Son of man who shall return will be this same Jesus who went away. The heavens will receive Him until the times of the restitution of all things of which the prophets have spoken. But he who was to be His forerunner in this temporary presence here could not be the same Elias. Accordingly John was conformed to the then manifestation of the Son of man, saving the difference that necessarily flowed from the Person of the Son of man, who could be but one, while that could not be the case with John the Baptist and Elias. But even as Jesus manifested all the power of the Messiah, all His rights to everything that belonged to that Messiah, without assuming as yet the outward glory, His time not being come John



7), so John fulfilled morally and in power the mission of Elias to prepare the way of the Lord before Him (according to the we character of His coming, as then accomplished), and answered literally to Isaiah 40, and even to Malachi 3, the only passages applied to him. This is the reason that John said he was not Elias, and that the Lord said, “If ye can receive it, this is Elias which was for to come.” Therefore also John never applied Malachi 4:5, 6 to himself; but he announces himself as fulfilling Isaiah 40:3-5, and this in each of the Gospels, whatever may be its particular character.\*

[\* See previous note.]

But let us go on with our chapter. If the Lord takes up into the glory, He comes down into this world, even now in Spirit and in sympathy, and meets the crowd and Satan’s power with which we have to do. While the Lord was on the Mount, a poor father had brought to the disciples his son who was a lunatic and possessed by a devil. Here is developed another character of man’s unbelief, that even of the believer — inability to make use of the power which is, so to say, at his disposal in the Lord. Christ, Son of God, Messiah, Son of man, had overcome the enemy, had bound the strong man and had a right to cast him out. As man, the obedient One in spite of Satan’s temptations, He had overcome him in the wilderness, and had thus a right as man to dispossess him of his dominion over a man as to this world; and this He did. In casting out devils and healing the sick, He delivered man from the power of the enemy. “God,” said Peter, “anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, and he went about doing good and healing all those that were oppressed by the devil.” Now this power should have been used by the disciples, who ought to have known how to avail themselves by faith of that which Jesus had thus manifested on earth; but they were not able to do it. Yet what availed it to bring this power down here, if the disciples had not faith to use it? The power was there: man might profit by it for complete deliverance from all the oppression of the enemy; but he had not faith to do so — even believers had not. The presence of Christ on earth was useless, when even His own disciples knew not how to profit by it. There was more faith in the man that brought his child than in them, for felt want brought him to its remedy. All therefore come under the Lord’s sentence, “O faithless and

perverse generation!” He must leave them, and that which the glory had revealed above, unbelief shall realise below.

Observe here, that it is not evil in the world which puts an end to a particular intervention of God; on the contrary, it occasions the intervention in grace. It was on account of Satan’s dominion over men that Christ came. He departs, because those who had received Him are incapable of using the power that He brought with Him, or that He bestows for their deliverance; they cannot profit by the very advantages then enjoyed. Faith was wanting. Nevertheless observe also this important and touching truth that, as long as such dispensation from God continues, Jesus does not fail to meet individual faith with blessing, even when His disciples cannot glorify Him by the exercise of faith. The same sentence that judges the unbelief of the disciples calls the distressed father to the enjoyment of the blessing. After all, to be able to avail ourselves of His power, we must be in communion with Him by the practical energy of faith.

He blesses then the poor father according to his need; and, full of patience, He resumes the course of instruction He was giving His disciples on the subject of His rejection and His resurrection as the Son of man. Loving the Lord, and unable to carry their ideas beyond the circumstances of the moment, they are troubled; and yet this was redemption, salvation, the glory of Christ.

Before however going farther, and teaching them that which became the disciples of a Master thus rejected and the position they were to occupy, He sets before them His divine glory, and their association with Him who had it, in the most touching manner, if they could but have understood it; and at the same time with perfect condescension and tenderness He places Himself with them, or rather He places them in the same place with Himself, as Son of the great King of the temple and of all the earth.

Those who collected the tribute-money for the service of the temple come and ask Peter if his Master does not pay it. Ever ready to put himself forward, forgetful of the glory he had seen, and the revelation made to him by the Father, Peter, coming down to the ordinary level of his own thoughts, anxious that his Master should be esteemed a good Jew and without consulting Him, replies that He does. The Lord anticipates Peter

on his coming in, and shows him His divine knowledge of that which took place at a distance from Himself. At the same time, He speaks of Peter and Himself as both children of the King of the temple (Son of God still keeping in patient goodness His lowly place as a Jew), and both therefore free from the tribute. But they should not offend. He then commands creation, (for He can do all things, as He knows all things,) and causes a fish to bring precisely the sum required, coupling anew the name of Peter with His own. He had said, "Lest we offend them"; and now, "Give unto them for me and thee." Marvelous and divine condescension! He who is the searcher of hearts, and who disposes at will of the whole creation, the Son of the sovereign Lord of the temple, puts His poor disciples into this same relationship with His heavenly Father, with the God who was worshipped in that temple. He submits to the demands that would have been rightly made on strangers, but He places His disciples in all His own privileges as Son. We see very plainly the connection between this touching expression of divine grace and the subject of these chapters. It demonstrates all the significance of the change that was taking place.

It is interesting to remark that the first epistle of Peter is founded on Matthew 16, and the second on chapter 17, which we have just been considering.\* In chapter 16 Peter taught of the Father, confessed the Lord to be the Son of the living God; and the Lord said that on this rock He would build His church, and that he who had the power of death should not prevail against it. Thus also Peter, in his first epistle, declares that they were born again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Now it is by this resurrection that the power of the life of the living God was manifested. Afterwards he calls Christ the living stone, in coming unto whom we, as living stones, are built up a holy temple to the Lord.

[\* Both these epistles, after stating redemption by the precious blood of Christ and being born of the incorruptible seed of the word, treat of the government of God; the first, its application to His own, preserving them, the second, to the wicked and the world, going on thus to the elements melting with fervent heat, and the new heavens and the new earth.]

In his second epistle he recalls, in a peculiar manner, the glory of the transfiguration, as a proof of the coming and the kingdom of the Son of man. Accordingly he speaks in that epistle of the judgment of the Lord.

In **CHAPTER 18** the great principles proper to the new order of things are made known to the disciples. Let us search a little into these sweet and precious instructions of the Lord.

They may be looked at in two ways. They reveal the ways of God with regard to that which was to take the place of the Lord upon earth, as a testimony to grace and truth. Besides this, they depict the character which is in itself the true testimony to be rendered.

This chapter supposes Christ rejected and absent, the glory of chapter 17 not yet come. It passes over chapter 17 to connect itself with chapter 16 (except so far as the last verses of chapter 17 give a practical testimony to His abdication of His true rights until God should vindicate them). The Lord speaks of the two subjects contained in chapter 16, the kingdom and the church.

That which would be proper for the kingdom was the meekness of a little child, which is unable to assert its own rights in the face of a world that passes it by — the spirit of dependence and humility. They must become as little children. In the absence of their rejected Lord this was the spirit that became His followers. He who received a little child in the name of Jesus received Himself. On the other hand, he who put a stumbling-block in the way of one of those little ones who believed in Jesus\* should be visited with the most terrible judgment. Alas! the world do this; but woe unto the world on that account. As to the disciples, if that which they most valued became a snare to them, they must pluck it out and cut it off — must exercise the utmost carefulness in grace not to be a snare to a little one believing in Christ, and the most unrelenting severity as to themselves, in whatever might be a snare to them. Loss of what was most precious here was nothing, compared with their eternal condition in another world; for that was in question now, and sin could have no place in God's house. Care for others, even the weakest, severity with self was the rule of the kingdom that no snare or evil might be. As to offense, full grace in forgiveness. They were not to despise these little ones; for if unable to force their own way in this world, they were the objects of the Father's special favor, as those who, in earthly courts, had the peculiar privilege of seeing the king's face. Not that there was no sin in them, but that the Father did not despise those that were far from Him. The Son of man was

come to save the lost.\*\* And it was not the Father's will that one of these little ones should perish. He spoke, I doubt not, of little children like those whom He took in His arms; but He inculcates on His disciples the spirit of humility and dependence on the one hand, and on the other, the spirit of the Father, which they were to imitate in order to be truly the children of the kingdom; and not to walk in the spirit of man, who seeks to maintain his place and his own importance, but to humble themselves and submit to contumely; and at the same time (and this is true glory) to imitate the Father, who considers the lowly and admits them into His presence. The Son of man was come on behalf of the worthless. This is the spirit of grace spoken of at the end of chapter 5. It is the spirit of the kingdom.

[\* The Lord here distinguishes a believing little one. In the other verses, He speaks of a little child, making its character, as such, a model of that of the Christian in this world.]

[\*\* As doctrine, the sinful condition of the child, and its need of the sacrifice of Christ, are clearly expressed here. He does not say, "Seek," as to them. The employing the parable of the lost sheep is striking here.]

But the assembly more especially was to occupy the place of Christ on earth. With respect to offenses against oneself, this same spirit of meekness became His disciple; he was to gain his brother. If the latter would hearken, the thing was to be buried in the heart of the one whom he had offended; if not, two or three more were then to be taken with him by the offended person to reach his conscience, or serve as witnesses; but if these appointed means were unavailing, it must be made known to the assembly; and if this did not produce submission, he who had done the wrong should be to him as a stranger, as a heathen and a publican was to Israel. The public discipline of the assembly is not treated of here, but the spirit in which Christians were to walk. If the offender bowed when spoken to, even seventy times seven times a day, he was to be forgiven. But though church discipline be not spoken of, we see that the assembly took the place of Israel on earth. The without and within henceforth applied to it. Heaven would ratify that which the assembly bound on earth, and the Father would grant the prayer of two or three who should agree together in making their request; for Christ would be in the midst wherever two or three should be gathered together in or to His name.\* Thus, for decisions, for prayers, they were as Christ on the earth, for Christ Himself was there with them. Solemn truth! immense favor,

bestowed on two or three when really gathered together in His name; but which forms a subject of the deepest grief when this unity is pretended to, while the reality is not there.\*\*

[\* It is important to call to mind here, that — while the Holy Ghost is personally fully recognised in Matthew, as in the birth of the Lord, and (chapter 10) as acting and speaking in the disciples in their service, as a divine Person, as it is ever from Him alone we can act rightly — the coming of the Holy Ghost, in the order of divine dispensation, forms no part of the teaching of this gospel, though recognised as a fact in chapter 10. The view of Christ in Matthew closes with His resurrection, and the Jewish body are sent out from Galilee as an accepted body to the world to evangelise the Gentiles, and He declares He will be with them to the end of the age. So here He is in the midst of two or three gathered to His name. The church here is not the body by the baptism of the Holy Ghost; it is not the house where the Holy Ghost dwells on earth; but where the two or three meet to His name, there Christ is. Now I do not doubt that all good from life on, and the word of life, comes from the Spirit, but this is another thing, and the assembly here is not the body, nor the house, through the coming down of the Holy Ghost. This was a subsequent teaching and revelation, and remains blessedly true; but it is Christ in the midst of those assembled to His name. Even in chapter 16 it is He builds, but that is another thing. Of course it is spiritually He is present.]

[\*\* It is very striking to find here, that the only succession in the office of binding and loosing which Heaven sanctions is that of two or three assembled in Christ's name.]

Another element of the character proper to the kingdom, which had been manifested in God and in Christ, is pardoning grace. In this also the children of the kingdom are to be imitators of God, and always to forgive. This refers only to wrongs done to oneself, and not to public discipline. We must pardon to the end, or rather, there must be no end; even as God has forgiven us all things. At the same time, I believe that the dispensations of God to the Jews are here described. They had not only broken the law, but they had slain the Son of God. Christ interceded for them, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." In answer to this prayer, a provisional pardon was preached by the Holy Ghost, through the mouth of Peter. But this grace too was rejected. When it was a question of showing grace to the Gentiles, who, no doubt, owed them the hundred pence, they would not hear of it, and they are given up to punishment,\* until the Lord can say, "They have received double for all their sins."

[\* This giving up, and the formal opening into the intermediate heavenly place connected with the Son of man in glory are in Acts 7, where Stephen recites their history from Abraham, the first called as root of promise, to that day.]

In a word, the spirit of the kingdom is not outward power, but lowliness; but in this condition there is nearness to the Father, and then it is easy to be meek and humble in this world. One who has tasted the favor of God will not seek greatness on earth; he is imbued with the spirit of grace, he cherishes the lowly, he pardons those who have wronged him, he is near God, and resembles Him in his ways. The same spirit of grace reigns, whether in the assembly or in its members. It alone represents Christ on the earth; and to it relate those regulations which are founded on the acceptance of a people as belonging unto God. Two or three really gathered together in the name of Jesus act with His authority, and enjoy His privileges with the Father, for Jesus Himself is there in their midst.

**CHAPTER 19** carries on the subject of the spirit that is suited to the kingdom of heaven, and goes deep into the principles which govern human nature, and of what was now divinely introduced. A question asked by the Pharisees — for the Lord had drawn nigh to Judea — gives rise to the exposition of His doctrine on marriage; and turning away from the law, given on account of the hardness of their hearts, He goes back\* to God's institution, according to which one man and one woman were to unite together, and to be one in the sight of God. He establishes, or rather re-establishes, the true character of the indissoluble bond of marriage. I call it indissoluble, for the exception of the case of unfaithfulness, is not one; the guilty person had already broken the bond. It was no longer man and woman one flesh. At the same time, if God gave spiritual power for it, it was still better to remain unmarried.

[\* The connection is here traced between the new thing and nature, as God had originally formed it, passing over the law as something merely come between. It was a new power, because evil had come in, but it recognised God's creation, while proving the state of the heart, not yielding to its weakness. Sin has corrupted what God created good. The power of the Spirit of God, given to us through redemption, raises man and his path wholly out of the whole condition of flesh, introduces a new divine power by which he walks in this world, after the example of Christ. But with this there is the fullest sanction of what God Himself originally established. It is good, though there may be what is better. The way the law is passed over to go back to God's original institution, where spiritual power did not take the heart wholly out of the whole scene, though walking in it, is very striking. In marriage, the child, the character of the young man, what is of God and

lovely in nature is recognised of the Lord. But the state of man's heart is searched out. This does not depend on character but motive, and is fully tested by Christ (there is an entire dispensational change, for riches were promised to a faithful Jew), and a rejected Christ — the path to heaven — everything, and the test of everything, that is of the heart of man. God made man upright with certain family relationships. Sin has wholly corrupted this old or first creation of man. The coming of the Holy Ghost has brought in a power which lifts, in the second Man, out of the old creation into the new, and gives us heavenly things — only not yet as to the vessel, the body; but it cannot disown or condemn what God created in the beginning. That is impossible. In the beginning God made them. When we come to heavenly condition, all this, though not the fruits of its exercises in grace, disappears. If a man in the power of the Holy Ghost has the gift to do it, and be entirely heavenly, so much the better; but it is entirely evil to condemn or speak against the relationships which God originally created, or diminish or detract from the authority which God has connected with them. If a man can live wholly above and out of them all, to serve Christ, it is all well; but it is rare and exceptional.]

He then renews His instruction with respect to children, while testifying His affection for them: here it appears to me rather in connection with the absence of all that binds to the world, to its distractions and its lusts, and owning what is lovely, confiding, and externally undefiled in nature; whereas, in chapter 18, it was the intrinsic character of the kingdom. After this, He shows (with reference to the introduction of the kingdom in His Person) the nature of entire devotedness and sacrifice of all things, in order to follow Him, if truly they only sought to please God. The spirit of the world was opposed at all points, both carnal passions and riches. No doubt the law of Moses restrained these passions; but it supposes them, and, in some respects, bears with them. According to the glory of the world, a child had no value. What power can it have there? It is of value in the Lord's eyes.

The law promised life to the man that kept it. The Lord makes it simple and practical in its requirements, or, rather, recalls them in their true simplicity. Riches were not forbidden by the law; that is to say, although moral obligation between man and man was maintained by the law, that which bound the heart to the world was not judged by it. Rather was prosperity, according to the government of God, connected with obedience to it. For it supposed this world, and man alive in it, and tested him there. Christ recognises this; but the motives of the heart are tested. The law was spiritual, and, the Son of God there; we find again what we found before — man tested and detected, and God revealed. All is intrinsic and eternal in



its nature, for God is revealed already. Christ judges everything that has a bad effect on the heart, and acts upon its selfishness, and thus separates it from God. "Sell that thou hast," says He, "and follow me." Alas! the young man could not renounce his possessions, his ease, himself. "Hardly," says Jesus, "shall a rich man enter into the kingdom." This was manifest: it was the kingdom of God, of heaven; self and the world had no place in it. The disciples, who did not understand that there is no good in man, were astonished that one so favored and well disposed should be still far from salvation. Who then could succeed? The whole truth then comes out. It is impossible to men. They cannot overcome the desires of the flesh. Morally, and as to his will and his affections, these desires are the man. One cannot make a negro white, or take his spots from the leopard: that which they exhibit is in their nature. But to God, blessed be His name! all things are possible.

These instructions with regard to riches give rise to Peter's question, What shall be the portion of those who have renounced everything? This brings us back to the glory in chapter 17. There would be a regeneration; the state of things should be entirely renewed under the dominion of the Son of man. At that time they should sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. They should have the first place in the administration of the earthly kingdom. Every one, however, should have his own place; for whatever any one renounced for Jesus' sake, he should receive a hundredfold and everlasting life. Nevertheless these things would not be decided by appearance here; nor by the place men held in the old system, and before men: some that were first should be last, and the last first. In fact, it was to be feared that the carnal heart of man would take this encouragement, given in the shape of reward for all his labor and all his sacrifices, in a mercenary spirit, and seek to make God his debtor; and, therefore, in the parable by which the Lord continues His discourse (chap. 20), He establishes the principle of grace and of God's sovereignty in that which He gives, and towards those whom He calls, in a very distinct manner, and makes His gifts to those whom He brings into His vineyard depend on His grace and on His call.

We may remark that, when the Lord answers Peter, it was the consequence of having left all for Christ upon His call. The motive was Christ Himself: therefore He says, "Ye which have followed me." He speaks also of those

who had done it for His name's sake. This was the motive. The reward is an encouragement, when, for His sake, we are already in the way. This is always the case when reward is spoken of in the New Testament.\* He who was called at the eleventh hour was dependent on this call for his entrance into the work; and if, in his kindness, the master chose to give him as much as the others, they should have rejoiced at it. The first adhered to justice; they received that which was agreed upon; the last enjoyed the grace of his master. And it is to be remarked that they accept the principle of grace, of confidence in it. "Whatsoever is right I will give!" The great point in the parable is that — confidence in the grace of the master of the vineyard, and grace as the ground of their action. But who understood it? A Paul might come in late, God having then called him, and be a stronger testimony to grace than the laborers who had wrought from the dawning of the gospel day.

[\* Indeed, reward is in scripture always an encouragement to those who are in sorrow and suffering by having from higher motives entered into God's way. So Moses; so even Christ, whose motive in perfect love we know, yet for the joy set before Him endured the cross despising the shame. He was the Leader and Completer in the path of faith.]

The Lord afterwards pursues the subject with His disciples. He goes up to Jerusalem, where the Messiah ought to have been received and crowned, to be rejected and put to death, but after that to rise again; and when the sons of Zebedee come and ask him for the two first places in the kingdom, He answers that He can lead them indeed to suffering; but as to the first places in His kingdom, He could not bestow them, except (according to the Father's counsels) on those for whom the Father had prepared them. Wondrous self-renunciation! It is for the Father, for us, that He works. He disposes of nothing. He can bestow on those who will follow Him a share in His sufferings: everything else shall be given according to the counsels of the Father. But what real glory for Christ and perfection in Him, and what a privilege for us to have this motive only, and to partake in the Lord's sufferings! and what a purification of our carnal hearts is here proposed to us, in making us act only for a suffering Christ, sharing His cross, and committing ourselves to God for recompense!

The Lord then takes occasion to explain the sentiments that become His followers, the perfection of which they had seen in Himself. In the world, authority was sought for; but the spirit of Christ was a spirit of service,

leading to the choice of the lowest place, and to entire devotedness to others. Beautiful and perfect principles, the full bright perfection of which was displayed in Christ. The renunciation of all things, in order to depend confidently on the grace of Him whom we serve, the consequent readiness to take the lowest place, and thus to be the servant of all — this should be the spirit of those who have part in the kingdom as now established by the rejected Lord. It is this that becomes His followers.\*

- [\* Observe the way in which the sons of Zebedee and their mother come to seek the highest place, at the moment when the Lord was preparing unreservedly to take the very lowest. Alas! we see so much of the same spirit. The effect was to bring out how absolutely He had stripped Himself of everything. These are the principles of the heavenly kingdom: perfect self-renunciation, to be contented in thorough devotedness; this is the fruit of love that seeketh not her own — the yieldingness that flows from the absence of self-seeking; submission when despised; meekness and lowliness of heart. The spirit of service to others is that which love produces at the same time as the humility which is satisfied with this place. The Lord fulfilled this even unto death, giving His life as a ransom for many.]

With the end of verse 28 this portion of the Gospel terminates, and the closing scenes of the blessed Savior's life begin. At verse 29\* begins His last presentation to Israel as the Son of David, the Lord, the true King of Israel, the Messiah. He begins His career in this respect at Jericho, the place where Joshua entered the land — the place on which the curse had so long rested. He opens the blind eyes of His people who believe in Him and receive Him as the Messiah, for such He truly was, although rejected. They salute Him as Son of David, and He answers their faith by opening their eyes. They follow Him — a figure of the true remnant of His people, who will wait for Him.

- [\* The case of the blind man at Jericho is, in all the first three Gospels, the commencement of the final circumstances of Christ's life which led on to the cross, the general contents and teachings of each being closed. Hence He is addressed as Son of David, being the last presentation of Himself as such to them, God's testimony being given to Him as such.]

Afterwards (chap. 21), disposing of all that belonged to His willing people, He makes His entry into Jerusalem as King and Lord, according to the testimony of Zechariah. But although entering as King — the last testimony to the beloved city, which (to their ruin) was going to reject Him — He comes as a meek and lowly King. The power of God influences the heart of the multitudes, and they salute Him as King, as Son of David,

making use of the language supplied by Psalm 118,\* which celebrates the millennial sabbath brought in by the Messiah, then to be acknowledged by the people. The multitude spread their garments to prepare the way for their meek, though glorious King; they cut down branches from the trees to bear Him testimony; and He is conducted in triumph to Jerusalem, while the people cry, “Hosanna Save now] to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!” Happy for them if their hearts had been changed to retain this testimony in the Spirit. But God sovereignly disposed their hearts to bear this testimony; He could not allow His Son to be rejected without receiving it.

[\* This Psalm is peculiarly prophetic of the time of His future reception, and is often cited in connection with it.]

And now the King is going to review everything, still maintaining His position of humility and of testimony. Apparently the different classes come to judge Him, or to perplex Him; but in fact they all present themselves before Him to receive at His hands, one after another, the judgment of God respecting them. It is a striking scene that opens before us — the true Judge, the everlasting King, presenting Himself for the last time to His rebellious people with the fullest testimony to His rights and to His power; and they, coming to harass and condemn Him, led by their very malice to pass before Him one after another, laying open their real condition, to receive their judgment from His lips, without His forsaking for a moment (unless in cleansing the temple, before this scene commenced) the position of Faithful and True Witness in all meekness on the earth.

The difference between the two parts of this history is distinguishable. The first presents the Lord in His character of Messiah and Jehovah. As Lord, He commands the ass to be brought. He enters the city, according to the prophecy, as King. He cleanses the temple with authority. In answer to the priests’ objection He quotes Psalm 8, which speaks of the manner in which Jehovah caused Himself to be glorified, and perfected the praises due to Him out of the mouth of babes. In the temple also He heals Israel. He then leaves them, no longer lodging in the city, which He could no longer own, but with the remnant outside. The next day, in a remarkable figure He exhibits the curse about to fall upon the nation. Israel was the fig-tree of Jehovah; but it cumbered the ground. It was covered with leaves,

but there was no fruit. The fig-tree, condemned by the Lord, presently withers away. It is a figure of this unhappy nation, of man in the flesh with every advantage, which bore no fruit for the Husbandman.

Israel in fact possessed all the outward forms of religion, and were zealous for the law and the ordinances, but they bore no fruit unto God. So far as placed under responsibility to bring forth fruit, that is to say, under the old covenant, they will never do so. Their rejection of Jesus put an end to all hope. God will act in grace under the new covenant; but this is not the question here. The fig-tree is Israel as they were, man cultivated by God, but in vain. All was over. That which He said to the disciples of the mountain's removing, while it is a great general principle, refers also, I doubt not, to that which should take place in Israel by means of their ministry. Looked at corporately on the earth as a nation, Israel should disappear, and be lost among the Gentiles. The disciples were those whom God accepted according to their faith.

We see the Lord entering Jerusalem as a king — Jehovah, the King of Israel — and judgment pronounced on the nation. Then follow the details of judgment on the different classes of which it was composed. First come the chief priests and elders, who should have guided the people; they draw near to the Lord and question His authority. Thus addressing Him, they took the place of heads of the nation, and assumed to be judges, capable of pronouncing on the validity of any claims that might be made; if not, why concern themselves with Jesus?

The Lord, in His infinite wisdom, puts a question to them which tests their capability and by their own confession they were incapable. How then judge Him? To tell them the foundation of His authority, was useless. It was too late now to tell them. They would have stoned Him, if He had alleged its true source. He replies, Decide on John the Baptist's mission. If they could not do this, why inquire respecting His? They cannot do it. If they acknowledged John to have been sent of God it would be acknowledging Christ. To deny it would be to lose their influence with the people. Of conscience there was no question with them. They confess their inability. Jesus then declines their competency as leaders and guardians of the faith of the people. They had judged themselves; and the

Lord proceeds to set their conduct, and the Lord's dealings with them, plainly before their eyes, from verse 28 to chapter 22:14.

[\* This throwing back on conscience is often the wisest answer, when the will is perverse.]

First, while professing to do the will of God, they did it not; while the openly wicked had repented and done His will. They, seeing this, were still hardened. Again, not only had natural conscience remained untouched, whether by the testimony of John, or by the sight of repentance in others, but, although God had used every means to make them bring forth fruit worthy of His culture, He had found nothing in them but perversity and rebellion. The prophets had been rejected, and His Son would be so likewise. They desired to have His inheritance for themselves. They could not but acknowledge that in such case the consequence must necessarily be the destruction of those wicked men, and the bestowal of the vineyard on others. Jesus applies the parable to themselves, by quoting Psalm 118, which announces that the stone rejected by the builders should become the head-stone of the corner; moreover, that whosoever should fall on this stone — as the nation was at that moment doing — should be broken; but that on whomsoever it should fall — and this would be the lot of the rebellious nation in the last days — it should grind them to powder. The chief priests and the Pharisees understood that He spoke of them, but they dared not lay hands on Him, because the multitude took Him for a prophet. This is the history of Israel, as under responsibility, even till the last days. Jehovah was seeking fruit in His vineyard.

In **CHAPTER 22**, their conduct with respect to the invitations of grace is presented in its turn. The parable is therefore a similitude of the kingdom of heaven. The purpose of God is to honor His Son by celebrating His marriage. First of all the Jews, already invited, are bidden to the marriage feast. They would not come. This was done during Christ's lifetime. Afterwards, all things being ready, He again sends forth messengers to induce them to come. This is the mission of the apostles to the nation, when the work of redemption had been accomplished. They either despise the message or slay the messengers.\* The result is the destruction of those wicked men and of their city. This is the destruction that fell upon Jerusalem. On their rejection of the invitation, the destitute, the Gentiles, those who were outside, are brought in to the feast, and the wedding is

furnished with guests. Another thing is now presented. It is true, that we have seen the judgment of Jerusalem in this parable, but, as it is a similitude of the kingdom, we have the judgment of that which is within the kingdom also. There must be fitness for the occasion. For a wedding feast there must be a wedding garment. If Christ is to be glorified, everything must be according to His glory. There may be an outward entrance into the kingdom, a profession of Christianity; but he who is not clothed with that which appertains to the feast will be cast out. We must be clothed with Christ Himself. On the other hand, all is prepared — nothing is required. It was not the guest's part to bring anything; the King provided all. But we must be imbued with the spirit of that which is done. If there is any thought of what was suitable to a wedding feast, the need of a wedding garment to appear in would surely be felt: if not, the honor of the King's Son has been forgotten. The heart was a stranger to it; the man himself shall become so by the judgment of the King when He takes cognizance of the guests who have come in.

[\* Contempt and violence are the two forms of the rejection of the testimony of God, and of the true witness. They hate the one and love the other, or cleave to the one and despise the other.]

Thus also grace has been shown to Israel, and they are judged for refusing the invitation of the great King to the marriage of His Son. And then the abuse of this grace by those who appear to accept it is also judged. The bringing in of the Gentiles is declared.

Here concludes the history of the judgment of Israel in general, and of the character which the kingdom would assume.

After this (chap. 22:15, et seq.) the different classes of the Jews come forward, each in turn. First, the Pharisees and the Herodians (that is, those who favored the authority of the Romans, and those who were opposed to it) seek to entangle Jesus in His talk. The blessed Lord answers them with that perfect wisdom that ever displayed itself in all He said and all He did. On their part, it was pure wickedness manifesting a total want of conscience. It was their own sin that had brought them under the Roman yoke — a position contrary indeed to that which should have belonged to the people of God on earth. Apparently therefore Christ must either become an object of suspicion to the authorities, or renounce His claim to be the Messiah and consequently the Deliverer. Who had occasioned this

dilemma? It was the fruit of their own sins. The Lord shows them that they had themselves accepted the yoke. The money bore the mark of this: let them render it then to those unto whom it belonged, and let them also — which they were not doing — render unto God the things that were God's. He leaves them under the yoke which they were obliged to confess they had accepted. He reminds them of the rights of God; which they had forgotten. Such might moreover have been Israel's state according to the establishment of power in Nebuchadnezzar, as a "spreading vine of low stature."

The Sadducees come next before Him, and question Him as to the resurrection, thinking to prove its absurdity. Thus, as the condition of the nation had been exhibited in His discourse with the Pharisees, the unbelief of the Sadducees is displayed here. They thought only of the things of this world, seeking to deny the existence of another. But whatever the state of degradation and subjection into which the people had fallen, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, changed not. The promises made to the fathers remained sure, and the fathers were living to enjoy these promises hereafter. It was the word and the power of God which were in question. The Lord maintains them with power and evidence. The Sadducees were silenced.

The lawyers, struck with His reply, ask a question, which gives the Lord occasion to extract from the whole law, that which, in the sight of God, is its essence, presenting thus its perfection, and that which — by whatever means it may be reached — forms the happiness of those that walk in it. Grace alone rises higher.

Here their questioning ceases. All is judged, all is brought to light with respect to the position of the people, and the sects of Israel; and the Lord has laid before them the perfect thoughts of God respecting them, whether on the subject of their condition, of His promises, or of the substance of the law.

It was now the Lord's turn to propose His question in order to bring out His own position. He asks the Pharisees to reconcile the title of Son of David with that of Lord which David himself gave Him, and that in connection with the ascension of this same Christ to sit at the right hand of God until God had made all His enemies His footstool, and established His



throne in Zion. Now this was the whole of Christ's position at that moment. They were unable to answer Him, and no man durst ask Him any more questions. In fact, to understand that Psalm, would have been to understand all the ways of God with respect to His Son at the time they were going to reject Him. This necessarily closed these discourses by showing the true position of Christ, who, although the Son of David, must ascend on high to receive the kingdom, and, while waiting for it, sit at the right hand of God according to the rights of His glorious Person — David's Lord, as well as David's Son.

There is another point of interest to be remarked here. In these interviews and these discourses with the different classes of the Jews, the Lord brings out the condition of the Jews on all sides with respect to their relations with God, and then the position which He took Himself. He first shows their national position towards God, as under responsibility to Him, according to natural conscience and the privileges belonging to them. The result would be their cutting off, and the bringing in of others into the Lord's vineyard. This is chapter 21:28-46. He then exhibits their condition with regard to the grace of the kingdom, and the introduction of Gentile sinners. Here also the result is the cutting off and the destruction of the city.\* Afterwards the Herodians and the Pharisees, the friends of the Romans and their enemies, the pretended friends of God, bring out the true position of the Jews with respect to the imperial power of the Gentiles and to God. In His interview with the Sadducees, He shows the certainty of the promises made to the fathers, and the relationship in which God stood to them in respect of life and resurrection. After this He puts the real meaning of the law before the scribes; and then the position which He took, Himself the Son of David, according to Psalm 110, which was linked with His rejection by the leaders of the nation who stood around Him.

[\* Observe here, that from chapter 21:28 to the end, we have the responsibility of the nation looked at as in possession of their original privileges, according to which they ought to have born fruit. Not having done so, another is put in their place. This was not the cause of the judgment which was, and yet is in a more terrible way to be, executed on Jerusalem, and which even then accomplished the destruction of the city. The death of Jesus, the last of those who had been sent to look for fruit, brings judgment on His murderers (Matthew 21:33-41). The destruction of Jerusalem is the consequence of the rejection of the testimony to the kingdom sent to call them in grace. In the first case, the judgment was upon the husbandmen — the scribes, and chief priests, and leaders of the people. The judgment executed on account of the

rejection of the testimony to the kingdom goes much farther (see chap. 22:7). Some despise the message, others ill-treat the messengers; and, grace being thus rejected, the city is burned up, and its inhabitants cut off. Compare chap. 23:36, and see the historical prophecy in Luke 21. The distinction is maintained in all three gospels.]

**CHAPTER 23** clearly shows how far the disciples are viewed in connection with the nation, inasmuch as they were Jews, although the Lord judges the leaders, who beguiled the people and dishonored God by their hypocrisy. He speaks to the multitude and to His disciples, saying, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat.” Being thus expositors of the law, they were to be obeyed in all that they said according to that law, although their own conduct was but hypocrisy. That which is important here is the position of the disciples; it is in fact the same as that of Jesus. They are in connection with all that is of God in the nation, that is to say, with the nation as the recognised people of God — consequently, with the law as possessing authority from God. At the same time the Lord judges, and the disciples also were practically to judge, the walk of the nation, as publicly represented by their leaders. While still forming part of the nation, they were carefully to avoid the walk of the scribes and Pharisees. After having reproached these pastors of the nation with their hypocrisy, the Lord points out the way in which they themselves condemned the deeds of their fathers — by building the sepulchres of the prophets whom they had slain. They were, then, the children of those who slew them, and God would put them to the test by sending them also prophets and wise men and scribes, and they would fill up the measure of their iniquity by putting these to death and persecuting them — condemned thus out of their own mouths — in order that all the righteous blood which had been shed, from Abel’s to that of the prophet Zechariah, should come upon this generation. Frightful amount of guilt, accumulated from the beginning of the enmity which sinful man, when placed under responsibility, has ever shown to the testimony of God; and which increased daily, because the conscience became more hardened each time that it resisted this testimony! The truth was so much the more manifest from its witnesses having suffered. It was a rock, exposed to view, to be avoided in the people’s path. But they persisted in their evil course, and every step in advance, every similar act, was the proof of a still increasing obduracy. The patience of God, while graciously dealing in testimony, had not been unobservant of their ways,

and under this patience all had accumulated. All would be heaped upon the head of this reprobate generation.

Remark here the character given to the apostles and christian prophets. They are scribes, wise men, prophets, sent to the Jews — to the ever rebellious nation. This very clearly brings out the aspect in which this chapter regards them. Even the apostles are “wise men,” “scribes,” sent to the Jews as such.

But the nation — Jerusalem, God’s beloved city — is guilty and is judged. Christ, as we have seen, since the cure of the blind man near Jericho, presents Himself as Jehovah the King of Israel. How often would He have gathered the children of Jerusalem, but they would not! And now their house should be desolate, until (their hearts being converted) they should use the language of Psalm 118, and, in desire, hail His arrival who came in the name of Jehovah, looking for deliverance at His hands, and praying to Him for it — in a word, until they should cry Hosanna to Him that should come. They would see Jesus no more until, humbled in heart, they should pronounce Him blessed whom they were expecting, and whom they now rejected — in short, until they were prepared in heart. Peace should follow, desire precede, His appearing.

The last three verses exhibit clearly enough the position of the Jews, or of Jerusalem, as the center of the system before God. Long since, and many times, would Jesus, Jehovah the Savior, have gathered the children of Jerusalem together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but they would not. Their house should remain forsaken and desolate, but not for ever. After having killed the prophets, and stoned the messengers sent unto them, they had crucified their Messiah, and rejected and slain those whom He had sent to proclaim grace unto them even after His rejection. Therefore should they see Him no more until they had repented, and the desire to see Him was produced in their hearts, so that they should be prepared to bless Him, and would bless Him in their hearts, and confess their readiness to do so. The Messiah, who was about to leave them, should be seen of them no more until repentance had turned their hearts unto Him whom they were now rejecting. Then they should see Him. The Messiah, coming in the name of Jehovah, shall be manifested to His people Israel. It is Jehovah their Savior who should appear, and the Israel who had

rejected Him should see Him as such. The people should thus return into the enjoyment of their relationship with God.

Such is the moral and prophetic picture of Israel. The disciples, as Jews, were viewed as part of the nation, though as a remnant spiritually detached from it, and witnessing in it.

We have already seen that the rejection of the testimony to the kingdom in grace, is the cause of the judgment that falls upon Jerusalem and its inhabitants. Now in chapter 24 we have the position of this testimony in the midst of the people; the condition of the Gentiles, and the relation in which they stood to the testimony rendered by the disciples; after this, the condition of Jerusalem, consequent upon her rejection of the Messiah, and her contempt for the testimony; and then the universal overthrow at the end of those days: a state of things which should be ended by the appearance of the Son of man, and the gathering together of the elect of Israel from the four winds.

We must examine this remarkable passage, at once a prophecy, and instruction to the disciples for their direction in the path they must follow amid the coming events.

Jesus departs from the temple, and that for ever — a solemn act, which, we may say, executed the judgment He had just pronounced. The house was now desolate. The hearts of the disciples were still bound to it by their former prepossessions. They draw His attention to the magnificent buildings that composed it. Jesus announces to them its entire destruction. Seated apart with Him on the Mount of Olives, the disciples inquire when these things were to happen, and what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age. They class together the destruction of the temple, the coming of Christ, and the end of the age. We must observe, that here the end of the age is the end of the period during which Israel was subject to the law under the old covenant: a period which was to cease, giving place to the Messiah and to the new covenant. Observe also that God's government of the earth is the subject, and the judgments that should take place at Christ's coming, which would put an end to the existing age. The disciples confounded that which the Lord had said of the destruction of the temple with this period.\* The Lord treats the subject from His own point of view (that is to say, with regard to the testimony

which the disciples were to render in connection with the Jews during His absence and to the end of the age). He adds nothing as to the destruction of Jerusalem, which He had already announced. The time of His coming was purposely hidden. Moreover the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus put an end, in fact, to the position which the Lord's instructions had in view. There was no longer any cognizable testimony among the Jews. When this position shall be resumed, the applicability of the passage will also recommence. After the destruction of Jerusalem until that time the church only is in question.

[\* In fact, this position of Israel, and the testimony connected with it, were interrupted by the destruction of Jerusalem; and this is the reason why that event presents itself to the mind in connection with this prophecy, of which it is certainly not the fulfillment. The Lord is not yet come, neither the great tribulation; but the state of things to which the Lord alludes, to the end of verse 14, was violently and judicially interrupted, by the destruction of Jerusalem, so that in this point of view there is a connection.]

The Lord's discourse is divided into three parts: 1. The general condition of the disciples and of the world during the time of the testimony, to the end of verse 14; 2. The period marked out by the fact that the abomination of desolation stands in the holy place (v. 15); 3. The Lord's coming and the gathering together of the elect in Israel (v. 29).

The time of the disciples' testimony is characterised by false Christs and false prophets among the Jews; persecution of those who render testimony, betraying them to the Gentiles. But there is yet something more definite with regard to those days. There would be false Christs in Israel. There would be wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes. They were not to be troubled: the end would not be yet. These things were only a beginning of sorrows. They were principally outward things. There were other events which would bring them into greater trial, and test them more thoroughly things more from within. The disciples should be delivered up, put to death, hated of all nations. The consequence of this among those who made profession would be that many would be offended; they would betray one another. False prophets would arise and deceive many, and, because iniquity abounded, the love of many should wax cold — a sorrowful picture. But these things would give occasion for the exercise of a faith that had been put to the proof. He who endured to the end should be saved. This concerns the sphere of testimony in particular. That which

the Lord says is not absolutely limited to the testimony in Canaan; but as it is from thence the testimony goes forth, it is all connected with that land as the center of God's ways. But, in addition to this, the gospel of the kingdom should be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then should the end come — the end of this age. Now, although heaven is the source of authority when the kingdom shall be established, Canaan and Jerusalem are its earthly center. So that the idea of the kingdom, while extending throughout the world, turns our thoughts to the land of Israel. It is "this gospel of the kingdom"\* which is here spoken of; it is not the proclamation of the union of the church with Christ, nor redemption in its fullness, as preached and taught by the apostles after the ascension, but the kingdom which was to be established on the earth, as John the Baptist, and as the Lord Himself, had proclaimed. The establishment of the universal authority of the ascended Christ should be preached in all the world to test their obedience, and to furnish those who had ears to hear with the object of faith.

[\* The gospel of the kingdom was confined to Israel in chapter 10 and here this, though no subject of the teaching, is the subject supposed up to verse 14, but there is no formal distinction made: the mission in chapter 28 is to the Gentiles; but then there is nothing of the kingdom but rather the contrary, though Christ be only risen, but all power given to Him in heaven and earth.]

This is the general history of that which would take place until the end of the age, without entering on the subject of the proclamation which founded the assembly properly so called. The impending destruction of Jerusalem, and the refusal of the Jews to receive the gospel, caused God to raise up a special testimony by the hands of Paul, without annulling the truth of the coming kingdom. That which follows proves that such a going forth of testimony of the kingdom will take place at the end, and that the testimony will reach all nations before the coming of that judgment which will put an end to the age.

But there will be a moment when, within a certain sphere (that is, in Jerusalem and its vicinity) a special time of suffering shall set in as regards the testimony in Israel. In speaking of the abomination that maketh desolate, the Lord refers us to Daniel, that we may understand whereof He speaks. Now Daniel (chap. 12, where this tribulation is spoken of) brings us definitely to the last days — the time when Michael shall stand up for

Daniel's people, that is, the Jews, who are under the domination of the Gentiles — the days in which there shall be a time of trouble, such as never had been nor ever again should be, and in which the remnant should be delivered. In the latter part of the previous chapter of that prophet, this time is called "the time of the end," and the destruction of the king of the north is prophetically declared. Now the prophet announces that 1335 days before the full blessing (blessed is he that has part therein!) the daily sacrifice should be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up; that from this moment there should be 1290 days (that is, one month more than the 1260 days spoken of in the Apocalypse, during which the woman who flees from the serpent is nourished in the wilderness; and also than the three years and a half of Daniel 7). At the end, as we find here, the judgment comes and the kingdom is given to the saints.

Thus it is proved that this passage refers to the last days and to the position of the Jews at that time. The events of the time past since the Lord uttered it confirm this thought. Neither in 1260 days, nor in 1260 years, after the days of Titus, nor in 30 days or years after, did any event take place which could be the accomplishment of these days in Daniel. The periods are gone by many years ago. Israel has not been delivered, neither has Daniel stood in his lot at the end of those days. It is equally plain that Jerusalem is in question in the passage, and its vicinity, for they that are in Judea are commanded to flee into the mountains. The disciples who shall be there at that time are to pray that their flight may not be on a sabbath day — an additional testimony that it is Jews who are the subject of the prophecy; but a testimony also of the tender care which the Lord takes of those who are His, thinking even in the midst of these unparalleled events, of whether it would be wintry weather at the time of their flight.

Besides this, other circumstances prove, if further proof were needed, that it is the Jewish remnant who are in question, and not the assembly. We know that all believers are to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. They will afterwards return with Him. But here there will be false Christs on the earth, and people will say, "He is here in the wilderness," "He is there in the secret chambers." But the saints who shall be caught up and return with the Lord have nothing at all to do with false Christs on earth, since they will go up to heaven to be with Him there, before He returns to

the earth; while it is easy to understand that the Jews, who are expecting earthly deliverance, should be liable to such temptations, and that they should be deceived by them unless kept by God Himself.

This part then of the prophecy applies to the last days, the last three years and a half before the judgment which will be suddenly poured out at the coming of the Son of man. The Lord will come suddenly as a flash of lightning, as an eagle to its prey, unto the spot where the object of His judgment is found. Immediately after the tribulation of those last three years and a half, the whole hierarchical system of government shall be shaken and utterly overthrown. Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. This verse (30) contains the answer to the second part of the disciples' inquiry in verse 3. The Lord gives His disciples the warnings necessary for their guidance; but the world would see no signs, however plain they might be to those that understand. But this sign should be at the moment of the Lord's appearing. The brightness of His glory whom they had despised would show them who it was that came; and it would be unexpected. What a terrible moment, when, instead of a Messiah who should answer to their worldly pride, the Christ whom they had despised shall appear in the heavens!

Afterwards the Son of man, thus come and manifested, would send to gather all the elect of Israel from the four corners of the earth. It is this which ends the history of the Jews, and even that of Israel, in answer to the disciples' question, and unfolds the dealings of God with respect to the testimony among the people who had rejected it, announcing the time of their deep distress, and the judgment that shall be poured out in the midst of this scene when Jesus comes, the subversion of all powers great and small being complete.

The Lord gives the history of the testimony in Israel, and that of the people themselves, from the moment of His departure until His return; but the length of time, during which there should be neither people nor temple nor city, is not specified. It is this which gives importance to the capture of Jerusalem. It is not here spoken of in direct terms — the Lord does not describe it; but it put an end to that order of things to which His discourse applies, and this application is not resumed until Jerusalem and the Jews



are again brought forward. The Lord announced it at the beginning. The disciples thought that His coming would take place at the same time. He answers them in such a manner that His discourse should be of use to them until the capture of Jerusalem. But when once the abomination of desolation is mentioned, we find ourselves carried on into the last days.

The disciples were to understand the signs He gave them. I have already said that the destruction of Jerusalem, by the fact itself, interrupted the application of His discourse. The Jewish nation was set aside; but verse 34 has a much wider sense, and one more really proper to it. Unbelieving Jews should exist, as such, until all was accomplished. Compare Deuteronomy 32:5, 20, where this judgment on Israel is specially in view. God hides His face from them until He shall see what their end will be, for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith. This has taken place. They are a distinct race of people unto this day. That generation exists in the same condition — a monument of the abiding certainty of God's dealings, and of the Lord's words.

To conclude, the government of God, exercised with regard to this people, has been traced to its end. The Lord comes, and He gathers together the dispersed elect of Israel.

The prophetic history continues in chapter 25:31, which is connected with chapter 24:30. And as chapter 24:31 relates the gathering together of Israel after the appearance of the Son of man, chapter 25:31 announces His dealings in judgment with the Gentiles. He will appear doubtless as the lightning with regard to the apostasy, which will be as a dead body in His sight. But when He shall come solemnly to take His earthly place in glory, that will not pass away like lightning. He shall sit upon the throne of His glory, and all nations shall be gathered before Him on His throne of judgment, and they shall be judged according to their treatment of the messengers of the kingdom, who had gone out to preach it unto them. These messengers are the brethren (v. 40); those who had received them are the sheep; those who had neglected their message are the goats. The account then which begins chapter 25:31, of the separation of sheep and goats and of its result, pictures the nations who are judged on earth according to their treatment of these messengers. It is the judgment of the living, so far at least as regards the nations — a judgment as final as that of

the dead. It is not Christ's judgment in battle as in Revelation 19. It is a session of His supreme tribunal in His right of government over the earth, as in Revelation 20:4 I speak of the principle or rather of the character of the judgment. I do not doubt that these brethren are Jews, such as the disciples were, that is to say, those who will be in a similar position as to their testimony. The Gentiles, who had received this message, should be accepted, as though they had treated Christ in the same manner. His Father had prepared for them the enjoyment of the kingdom; and they should enter into it, being still on earth, for Christ was come down in the power of eternal life.\*

- [\* There is no possible ground for applying this parable to what is called the general judgment, an expression indeed wholly unscriptural. First, there are three parties, not merely two — goats, sheep, and brethren; then, it is the judgment of the Gentiles only; and, further, the ground of judgment is wholly inapplicable to the great mass even of these last. The ground of judgment is the way these brethren have been received. Now none have been sent at all to the vast majority of the Gentiles in long ages. The time of this ignorance God winked at, and another ground of judgment as to them is given in the beginning of Romans. Christians and Jews have been already treated of in chapter 24 and the previous part of chapter 25. It is just those whom the Lord finds on earth when He comes, and who will be judged according to their treatment of the messengers He has sent.]

I have, for the moment, passed over all between chapter 24:31 and chapter 25:31, because the end of this last chapter completes all that concerns the government and the judgment of the earth. But there is a class of persons whose history is given us in its great moral features intermediately between these two verses I have just mentioned.

These are the disciples of Christ, outside the testimony born in the midst of Israel, to whom He has committed His service, and a position in connection with Himself, during His absence. This position and this service are in connection with Christ Himself, and not in connection with Israel, wherever it may be that this service is accomplished.

There are however, before we come to these, some verses of which I have not yet spoken, which apply more particularly to the state of things in Israel, as warning to the disciples who are there, and describe the discriminating judgment which takes place among the Jews in the last days. I speak of them here, because all this part of the discourse — namely, from chapter 24:31 to chapter 25:31 — is an exhortation, an address from the

Lord, on the subject of their duties during His absence. I refer to chapter 24:32-44. They speak of the continual expectation which their ignorance of the moment when the Son of man would come imposed on the disciples, and in which the disciples were intentionally left (and the judgment is the earthly one); while from verse 45, the Lord addresses Himself more directly, and at the same time in a more general manner, to their conduct during His absence, not in connection with Israel, but with His own — His household. He had committed to them the task of supplying them with suitable food in due season. This is the responsibility of ministry in the assembly.

It is important to remark that in the first parable the state of the assembly is looked at as a whole; the parable of the virgins and that of the talents give individual responsibility. Hence the servant who is unfaithful is cut off and has his portion with hypocrites. The state of the responsible assembly depended on their waiting for Christ, or their heart saying He delays His coming. It would be on His return that judgment should be pronounced on their faithfulness during the interval. Faithfulness should be approved in that day. On the other hand, practical forgetfulness of His coming would lead to licence and tyranny. It is not an intellectual system that is meant here: “the evil servant says in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming”; his will was concerned in it. The result was that the fleshly will manifested itself. It was no longer devoted service to His household, with a heart set upon the Master’s approval at His return; but worldliness in conduct, and the assumption of arbitrary authority, to which the service appointed him gave occasion. He eats and drinks with the drunken, he unites himself to the world and partakes in its ways; he smites his fellow-servants at his will. Such is the effect of putting off during His absence, deliberately in heart, the Lord’s return and holding the assembly to be settled down here; instead of faithful service, worldly-mindedness and tyranny. Is it not too true a picture?

What is it that has happened to those who had the place of service in the house of God? The consequences on either hand are these: the faithful servant, who from love and devotion to his Master applied himself to the welfare of His household, should be made ruler on his Master’s return over all His goods; those who have been faithful in the service of the house shall be set over all things by the Lord, when He takes His place of power and

acts as King. All things are given into the hands of Jesus by the Father. Those who in humility have been faithful to His service during His absence shall be made rulers over all that is committed to Him, that is, over all things — they are but the “goods” of Jesus. On the other hand, he who during the Lord’s absence had set himself up as master, and followed after the spirit of the flesh and of the world to which he had united himself, should not merely have the world’s portion: his Master should come quite unexpectedly, and he should receive the punishment of hypocrites. What a lesson for those who take to themselves a place of service in the assembly! Observe here, that it is not said he is drunken himself, but that he eats and drinks with those that are so. He allies himself with the world and follows its customs. This moreover is the general aspect which the kingdom will assume in that day, although the heart of the evil servant was wicked. The Bridegroom would indeed tarry; and the consequences that might be expected from the heart of man will not fail to be realised. But the effect, we then find, is to make manifest those who had\* really the grace of Christ and those who had not.

[\* How solemn the testimony given here to the effect of the assembly’s losing the present expectation of the Lord’s return! What causes the professing church to run into hierarchical oppression and worldliness, so as to be cut off in the end as hypocrites, is saying in the heart, My Lord delayeth his coming — giving up the present expectation. That has been the source of the ruin. The true christian position was lost as soon as they began to put off the Lord’s coming; and they are treated, note, though in this state, as the responsible servant.]

**CHAPTER 25.** Professors, during the Lord’s absence, are here presented as virgins, who went out to meet the Bridegroom, and light Him to the house. In this passage He is not the Bridegroom of the church. No others go to meet Him for His marriage with the church in heaven. The bride does not appear in this parable. Had she been introduced, it would have been Jerusalem on earth. The assembly is not seen in these chapters as such.

It is here individual\* responsibility during the absence of Christ. That which characterised the faithful at this period was that they came out from the world, from Judaism, from everything, even religion connected with the world, to go and meet the coming Lord. The Jewish remnant, on the contrary, wait for Him in the place where they are. If this expectation were real, the characteristic of one governed by it would be the thought of that

which was necessary for the coming One — the light, the oil. Otherwise, to be the companions of professors meanwhile, and to carry lamps with them, would satisfy the heart. Nevertheless they all took a position; they go out, they leave the house to go out and meet the Bridegroom. He tarries. This also has taken place. They all fall asleep. The whole professing church has lost the thought of the Lord's return — even the faithful who have the Spirit. They must also have gone in again somewhere to sleep at ease — a place of rest for the flesh. But at midnight, unexpectedly, the cry is raised, "Behold, the bridegroom; go ye out to meet him." Alas! they needed the same call as at first. They must again go out to meet Him. The virgins rise, and trim their lamps. There is time enough between the midnight cry and the Bridegroom's arrival to prove the condition of each. There were some who had no oil in their vessels. Their lamps were going out.\*\* The wise had oil. It was impossible for them to share it with the others. Those only who possessed it went in with the Bridegroom to take part in the marriage. He refused to acknowledge the others. What business had they there? The virgins were to give light with their lamps. They had not done it. Why should they share the feast? They had failed in that which gave this place. What title had they to be at the feast The virgins of the feast were virgins who accompanied the Bridegroom. These had not done so. They were not admitted. But even the faithful ones had forgotten the coming of Christ. They fell asleep. But, at least, they possessed the essential thing that corresponded to it. The grace of the Bridegroom causes the cry to be raised which proclaims His arrival. It awakens them: they have oil in their vessels; and the delay, which occasions the lamps of the unfaithful to go out, gives the faithful time to be ready and at their place; and forgetful as they may have been, they go in with the Bridegroom to the wedding feast +

[\* The servant in chapter 24 is collective responsibility.]

[\*\* The word rather signifies torches. With them they had, or should have had, oil in vessels to feed the flame.]

[+ And note here, the waking up is by the cry; it wakes up all. There IS enough to rouse all professors to needed activity; but the effect of this is to put them to the test, and separate them. It was not the time of getting oil or supplies of grace to those already professors; conversion is not the subject of the parable. The question of getting oil is only I doubt now, to show it was not the time of doing so.]

We pass now from state of soul to service.

For in truth (v. 14) it is as a man who had gone away from his home — for the Lord dwelt in Israel — and who commits his goods to his own servants, and then departs. Here, we have the principles that characterise faithful servants, or the contrary. It is not now the personal individual expectation, and the possession of the oil, requisite for a place in the Lord's glorious train; neither is it the public and general position of those who were in the Master's service, characterised as position and as a whole, and therefore represented by a single servant; it is individual faithfulness in the service, as before in the expectation of the Bridegroom. The Master on His return will reckon with each one. Now what was their position? What was the principle that would produce faithfulness? Observe, first of all, that it is not providential gifts, earthly possessions, that are meant. These are not the "goods that Jesus committed to His servants when He went away. They were gifts which fitted them to labor in His service while He was absent. The Master was sovereign and wise. He gave differently to each, and to each according to his capacity. Each was fitted for the service in which he was employed, and the gifts needed for its fulfillment were bestowed on him. Faithfulness to perform it was the only thing in question. That which distinguished the faithful from the unfaithful was confidence in their Master. They had sufficient confidence in His well-known character, in His goodness, His love, to labor without being authorised in any other manner than by their knowledge of His personal character, and by the intelligence which that confidence and that knowledge produced. Of what use to give them sums of money, except to trade with them? Had He failed in wisdom when He bestowed these gifts? The devotedness that flowed from knowledge of their Master counted upon the love of Him whom they knew. They labored, and they were rewarded. This is the true character, and the spring, of service in the church. It is this that the third servant lacked. He did not know his Master — he did not trust in Him. He could not even do that which was consistent with his own thoughts. He waited for some authorisation which would be a security against the character his heart falsely gave his Master. Those who knew their Master's character entered into His joy.

There is this difference between the parable here and that in Luke 19, that in the latter each man receives one pound; his responsibility is the only

question. And consequently he who gained ten pounds is set over ten cities. Here the sovereignty and the wisdom of God are concerned, and he who labors is guided by the knowledge he has of his Master; and the counsels of God in grace are accomplished. He who has the most receives yet more. At the same time the reward is more general. He who has gained two talents, and he who has gained five, enter alike into the joy of the Lord whom they have served. They have known Him in His true character, they enter into His full joy. The Lord grant it unto us!

There is more than this in the second parable — that of the virgins. It refers more directly and more exclusively to the heavenly character of Christians. It is not the assembly, properly so called, as a body; but the faithful have gone out to meet the Bridegroom, who was returning to the marriage. At the time of His return to execute judgment, the kingdom of heaven will assume the character of persons come out from the world, and still more from Judaism — from all that, in point of religion, belongs to the flesh — from all established worldly form — to have to do with the coming Lord alone, and to go out to meet Him. This was the character of the faithful from the beginning, as having part in the kingdom of heaven, if they had understood the position in which they were placed by the Lord's rejection. The virgins, it is true, had gone in again; and this falsified their character; but the midnight cry brought them back into their true place. Therefore they go in with the Bridegroom, and there is no question of judging and rewarding, but of being with Him. In the first parable, and in that of Luke, the subject is His return to earth, and individual recompense — the results, in the kingdom, of their conduct during the King's absence.\* Service and its results are not the subject in the parable of the virgins. Those who have no oil do not go in at all. This is enough. The others have blessing in common; they go in with the Bridegroom to the marriage. There is no question of particular reward, nor of difference in conduct between them. It was the heart's expectation, though grace had to bring them back into it. Whatever the place of service might have been, the reward was sure. This parable applies and is limited to the heavenly portion of the kingdom as such. It is a similitude of the kingdom of heaven.

[\* In that of the talents in Matthew, we get indeed the ruling over many things, the kingdom, but it is more full through the expression, Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord; and the blessing is conferred on all alike who were faithful in service, great or small.]

We may also remark here, that the delay of the Master is noticed in the third parable likewise — "after a long time" (v. 19). Their faithfulness and their constancy were thus put to the test. May the Lord give unto us to be found faithful and devoted, now in the end of the ages, that He may say unto us, "Good and faithful servants!" It is worthy of remark that in these parables those who are in service, or go out at first, are the same as those found at the end. The Lord would not hold out the supposition of delay beyond "we who are alive and remain."\*

[\* So in the churches in Revelation, He takes existing churches, though I doubt not it is a complete history of the church.]

Weeping and gnashing of teeth are his portion who has not known his Master, who has outraged Him by the thoughts he entertained of His character.

In verse 31 the prophetic history is resumed from verse 31 of chapter 24. There we saw the Son of man appear like a flash of lightning, and afterwards gather together the remnant of Israel from the four corners of the earth. But this is not all. If He thus appears in a manner as sudden as unexpected, He also establishes His throne of judgment and glory on the earth. If He destroys His enemies whom He finds in rebellion against Himself, He also sits upon His throne to judge all nations. This is the judgment on earth of the living. Four different parties are here found together; the Lord, the Son of man Himself — the brethren — the sheep — and the goats. I believe the brethren here to be Jews, His disciples as Jews, whom He had employed as His messengers, to preach the kingdom during His absence. The gospel of the kingdom was to be preached as a testimony to all nations; and then the end of the age should come. At the time here spoken of, this has been done. The result should be manifested before the throne of the Son of man on earth.

He calls these messengers therefore His brethren. He had told them they should be ill-treated: they had been so. Still there were some who had received their testimony.

Now such was His affection for His faithful servants, so highly did He value them, that He judged those to whom the testimony was sent according to the manner in which they had received these messengers, whether well or ill, as though it had been done to Himself. What an



encouragement for His witnesses during that time of trouble, tried as their faith should be in service! At the same time it was justice morally to those who were judged; for they had rejected the testimony by whomsoever it was rendered. We have also the result of their conduct, both the one and the other. It is the King — for this is the character Christ has now taken on earth — who pronounces judgment; and He calls the sheep (those who had received the messengers, and had sympathised with them in their afflictions and persecutions) to inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world; for such had been the purpose of God with respect to this earth. He had always the kingdom in view. They were the blessed of His (the King's) Father. It was not children who understood their own relation with their Father; but they were the receivers of blessing from the Father of the King of this world. Moreover they were to enter into everlasting life; for such was the power, through grace, of the word which they had received into their heart. Possessed of everlasting life, they should be blessed in a world that was blessed also.

They who had despised the testimony and those that bore it, had despised the King who sent them; they should go away into everlasting punishment.

Thus the whole effect of Christ's coming, with regard to the kingdom and to His messengers during His absence, is unfolded: with respect to the Jews, as far as verse 31 of chapter 24; with respect to His servants during His absence, to the end of verse 30 of chapter 25, including the kingdom of heaven in its present condition, and the heavenly rewards that shall be given; and then, from verse 31 to the end of chapter 25, with respect to the nations who shall be blessed on the earth at His return.

The Lord had finished His discourses. He prepares (chap. 26) to suffer, and to make His last and touching adieus to His disciples, at the table of His last passover on earth, at which He instituted, the simple and precious memorial which recalls His sufferings and His love with such profound interest. This part of our Gospel requires little explanation — not, assuredly, that it is of less interest, but because it needs to be felt rather than explained.

With what simplicity the Lord announces that which was to happen! (v. 2). He had already arrived at Bethany, six days before the passover (John 12:1): there He abode, with the exception of the last supper, until He was

taken captive in the garden of Gethsemane, although He visited Jerusalem, and partook of His last meal there.

We have already examined the discourses uttered during those six days, as well as His actions, such as the cleansing of the temple. That which precedes this chapter (26) is either the manifestation of His rights as Emmanuel, King of Israel, or that of the judgment of the great King with respect to the people — a judgment expressed in discourses to which the people could make no answer; or, finally, the condition of His disciples during His absence. We have now His submission to the sufferings appointed Him, to the judgment about to be executed upon Him; but which was, in truth, only the fulfillment of the counsels of God His Father, and of the work of His own love.

The picture of man's dreadful sin in the crucifixion of Jesus unfolds before our eyes. But the Lord Himself (chap. 26:1) announces it beforehand with all the calmness of One who had come for this purpose. Before the consultations of the chief priests had taken place, Jesus speaks of it as a settled thing: "Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified."

Afterwards (v. 3) the priests, the scribes, and the elders assemble to concert their plans for obtaining possession of His Person, and ridding themselves of Him.

In a word, first, the marvelous counsels of God, and the submission of Jesus, according to His knowledge of those counsels and of the circumstances which should accomplish them; and, afterwards, the iniquitous counsels of man, which do but fulfill those of God. Their purposed arrangement of detail not to take Him on the feast day as they dreaded the people (chap. 26:5) was not God's and fails: He was to suffer at the feast.

Judas was but the instrument of their malice in the hand of Satan; who, after all, did but arrange these things according to divine intention. They wished, but in vain, to avoid taking Him at the time of the feast, on account of the multitude, who might favor Jesus, if He appealed to them. They had done so at His entrance into Jerusalem. They supposed Jesus would do so, for wickedness always reckons on finding its own principles

in others. This is why it so frequently fails in circumventing the upright — they are artless. Here it was the will of God, that Jesus should suffer at the feast. But He had prepared a gracious relief to the heart of Jesus — a balm to His heart more than to His body — a circumstance which is used by the enemy to drive Judas to extremity and put him in connection with the chief priests.

Bethany (linked in memory with the last moments of peace and tranquillity in the Savior's life, the place where dwelt Martha and Mary, and Lazarus the risen dead) Bethany\* receives Jesus for the last time: the blessed but momentary retreat of a heart which, ever ready to pour itself out in love, was ever straitened in a world of sin, that did not and could not respond to it; yet a heart which has given us, in His relations with this beloved family, the example of an affection perfect, yet human, which found sweetness in being responded to and appreciated. The nearness of the cross, where He would have to set His face as a flint, did not deprive His heart of the joy or the sweetness of this communion, while rendering it solemn and affecting. In doing the work of God He did not cease to be man. In everything He condescended to be ours. He could no longer own Jerusalem, and this sanctuary sheltered Him for a moment from the rude hand of man. Here He could display what He ever was as man. It is with reason, that the act of one who in a certain sense could appreciate what He felt\*\* (whose affection instinctively entered into the rising enmity against the object she loved and was drawn out by it), and the act that expressed the estimate her heart had of His preciousness and grace should be told in all the world. This is a scene, a testimony, that brings the Lord sensibly near to us, that awakens a feeling in our hearts which sanctifies by binding them to His beloved Person.

[\* It was not in Martha's house that this scene took place, but that of Simon the leper: Martha served and Lazarus sat at meat. This makes the intelligent act of Mary more entirely personal.]

[\*\* No instance is found of the disciples ever understanding what Jesus said to them.]

His daily life was one continued tension of soul, in proportion to the strength of His love — a life of devotedness in the midst of sin and misery. For a moment He could, and would own (in presence of the power of evil, now to have its way, and the love that clung to Him thus bowing under it,

through true knowledge of Him cultivated in sitting at His feet) that devotedness to Himself, drawn out by that which His soul was in divine perfectness bowing to. He could give an intelligent voice, its true meaning, to that which divinely wrought affection silently acted on.\*

[\* Christ meets the heart of the poor woman in the city which was a sinner, and told God's mind out there, and told it to her. He meets Mary's heart here, and justifies and satisfies her affection, and gave the divine estimate of what she did. He met Mary Magdalene's heart at the sepulchre, to whom the world was emptiness if He was not there, and tells God's mind in its highest forms of blessing. Such is the effect of attachment to Christ.]

The reader will do well carefully to study this scene of touching condescension and outpouring of heart. Jesus, Emmanuel, King and Supreme Judge, had just been causing all things to pass in judgment before Him (from chap. 21 to the end of 25). He had finished that which He had to say. His task here, in this respect, was accomplished. He now takes the place of Victim; He has only to suffer, and can allow Himself freely to enjoy the touching expressions of affection that flow from a heart devoted to Him. He could but taste the honey and pass on; but He does taste it, and did not reject an affection which His heart could and did appreciate.

Again, observe the effect of deep affection for the Lord. This affection necessarily breathes the atmosphere in which, at that moment, the spirit of the Lord is found. The woman who anointed Him was not informed of the circumstances about to happen, nor was she a prophetess. But the approach of that hour of darkness was felt by one whose heart was fixed on Jesus.\* The different forms of evil developed themselves before Him, and displayed themselves in their true colors; and, under the influence of one master, even Satan, grouped themselves around the only object against whom it was worthwhile to array this concentration of malice, and who brought their true character out into open daylight.

[\* The enmity of the chiefs of Israel was known to the disciples — "Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?" And afterwards by Thomasa gracious testimony to the love of one who afterwards showed his unbelief as to Jesus' resurrection — "let us go that we may die with him." Mary's heart doubtless felt this enmity, and as it grew, her attachment to the Lord grew with it.]

But the perfectness of Jesus, which drew out the enmity, drew out the affection in her; and she (so to speak) reflected the perfectness in the

affection; and as that perfectness was put in action and drawn to light by the enmity, so was her affection. Thus Christ's heart could not but meet it. Jesus, by reason of this enmity, was still more the object that occupied a heart which, doubtless led of God, instinctively apprehended what was going on. The time of testimony, and even that of the explanation of His relationship to all around Him, was over. His heart was free to enjoy the good and true and spiritual affections of which He was the object; and which, whatever might be their human form, showed so plainly their divine origin, in that they were attached to that object on which, at this solemn moment, all the attention of heaven was centered.

Jesus Himself was conscious of His position. His thoughts were on His departure. During the exercise of His power, He hides — He forgets — Himself. But now oppressed, rejected, and like a lamb led to the slaughter, He feels that He is the just object of the thoughts of those who belong to Him, of all who have hearts to appreciate that which God appreciates. His heart is full of the coming events, see v. 2, 10-13, 18, 21.

But yet a few words more on the woman who anointed Him. The effect of having the heart fixed in affection on Jesus is shown in her in a striking manner. Occupied with Him, she is sensible of His situation. She feels what affects Him; and this causes her affection to act in accordance with the special devotedness which that situation inspires. As hatred against Him rose up to murderous intent, the spirit of devotedness to Him grows in answer to it in her. Consequently, with the tact of devotedness, she does precisely that which was suited to His situation. The poor woman was not intelligently aware of this; yet she did the thing that was meet. Her value for the Person of Jesus, so infinitely precious to her, made her quick-sighted with respect to that which was passing in His mind. In her eyes Christ was invested with all the interest of His circumstances; and she lavishes upon Him that which expressed her affection. Fruit of this sentiment, her action met the circumstances; and, although it was but the instinct of her heart, Jesus gives it all the value which His perfect intelligence could attribute to it, embracing at once the sentiments of her heart and the coming events.

But this testimony of affection and devotedness to Christ brings out the selfishness, the want of heart, of the others. They blame the poor woman.

Sad proof (to say nothing of Judas\*) how little the knowledge of that which concerns Jesus necessarily awakens suitable affection in our hearts! After this Judas goes out, and agrees with the unhappy priests to betray Jesus to them for the price of a slave.

[\* Judas's heart was the spring of this evil, but the other disciples, not occupied with Christ, fall into the snare.]

The Lord pursues His career of love; and as He had accepted the poor woman's testimony of affection, so He now bestows on His disciples one of infinite value to our souls. Verse 16 concludes the subject of which we have been speaking: Christ's knowledge, according to God, of that which awaited Him; the conspiracy of the priests; the affection of the poor woman, accepted by the Lord; the selfish cold-heartedness of the disciples; the treachery of Judas.

The Lord now institutes the memorial of the true passover. He sends the disciples to make arrangements for the celebration of the feast at Jerusalem. He points out Judas as the one who would deliver Him up to the Jews. It will be noticed, that it was not merely His knowledge of the one who should betray Him which the Lord here expresses — He knew that when He called him; but He says, "One of you shall betray me." It was that which touched His heart: He wished it to touch theirs likewise.

He then points out that it is a Savior slain who is to be remembered. It is no longer a question of the living Messiah: all that was over. It was no longer the remembrance of Israel's deliverance from the slavery of Egypt. Christ, and Christ slain, began an entirely new order of things. Of Him they were now to think — of Him slain on earth. He then draws their attention to the blood of the new covenant, adding that which extends it to others besides the Jews, without naming them — "It is shed for many." Moreover, this blood is not, as at Sinai, only to confirm the covenant, for fidelity to which they were responsible; it was shed for the remission of sins. So that the Lord's supper presents the remembrance of Jesus slain, who, by dying, has broken with the past; has laid the foundation of the new covenant; obtained the remission of sins; and opened the door to the Gentiles. It is only in His death that the supper presents Him to us. His blood is apart from His body: He is dead. It is neither Christ living on the earth, nor Christ glorified in heaven. He is separate from His people, as to

their joys on earth; but they are to expect Him as the companion of the happiness He has secured for them — for He condescends to be so — in better days: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new\* with you in my Father's kingdom." But, these links broken, who, save Jesus, could sustain the conflict? All would forsake Him. The testimonies of the word should be accomplished. It was written, "I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad."

[\* "New" is not anew, but in an entirely new way.]

Nevertheless He would go, to renew His relationship, as a risen Savior, with these poor of the flock, to the same place where He had already identified Himself with them during His life. He would go before them into Galilee. This promise is very remarkable, because the Lord resumes, under a new form, His Jewish relationship with them and with the kingdom. We may here remark that, as He had judged all classes (to the end of chap. 25), He now exhibits the character of His relationship with all those among whom He maintained any. Whether it is the woman, or Judas, or the disciples, each one takes his place in connection with the Lord. This is all we find here. If Peter had natural energy enough to go a little farther, it would only be for a deeper fall in the place where the Lord alone could stand.

And now He isolates Himself to present, in supplication to His Father, the sufferings that awaited Him.

But while isolating Himself for prayer, He takes three of His disciples with Him, that in this solemn moment they may watch with Him. They were the same three who were with Him during the transfiguration. They were to see His glory in the kingdom, and His sufferings. He goes a little way beyond them. As for them, they fall asleep, as they did on the mount of transfiguration. The scene here is described in Hebrews 5:7. Jesus was not yet drinking the cup, but it was before His eyes. On the cross He drank it, made sin for us, His soul feeling itself forsaken of Him. Here it is the power of Satan, using death as a terror with which to overwhelm Him. But the consideration of this subject will be more in place when we come to Luke's Gospel.

We here see His soul under the load of death — by anticipation as He alone could know it, nor had it as yet lost its sting. We know who has the power of death, and death as yet had the full character of the wages of sin, and the curse, of God's judgment. But He watches and He prays. As man, subjected by His love to this assault, in the presence of the most powerful temptation to which He could be exposed, on the one hand He watches; on the other, He presents His anguish to His Father. His communion was not interrupted here, however great His distress. This distress only cast Him the more, in all submission and in all reliance, upon His Father. But if we were to be saved, if God was to be glorified in Him who had undertaken our cause, the cup must not pass away from Him. And His submission is complete.

He tenderly reminds Peter of his false confidence,\* making him sensible of his weakness; but Peter was too full of himself to profit by it; he awakes from his sleep, but his self-confidence is not shaken. A sadder experience was needed for its cure.

[\* It is wonderful to see the Lord in the full agony of the anticipated cup, only as yet presenting it to His Father, not drinking the cup; yet turning to the disciples and speaking to them in calm grace as if in Galilee, and turning back to the dreadful conflict of spirit Himself exactly for what was before His soul. In Matthew He is victim, I add, and every aggravation, with no alleviating circumstance, is here what His soul meets.]

The Lord therefore takes the cup, but He takes it from His Father's hand. It was His will that He should drink it. Committing Himself thus entirely to His Father, it is neither from the hand of His enemies, nor from that of Satan (though they were the instruments), that He takes it. According to the perfection with which He had subjected Himself to the will of God in this matter, committing all to Him, it is from His hand alone that He receives it. It is the Father's will. It is thus that we escape from second causes, and from the temptations of the enemy, by seeking only the will of God who directs all things. It is from Him we receive affliction and trial, if they come.

The disciples need no longer watch: the hour is come.\* He was to be betrayed into the hands of men. This was saying enough. Judas designates Him by a kiss. Jesus goes to meet the multitude, rebuking Peter for seeking to resist with carnal weapons. Had Christ wished to escape, He could have



asked for twelve legions of angels and had them; but all things must be fulfilled.\*\* It was the hour of His submission to the effect of the malice of man and the power of darkness, and God's judgment against sin. He is the Lamb for the slaughter. Then all the disciples forsake Him. He surrenders Himself, setting before the crowd that came what they were doing. If no one can prove Him guilty, He will not deny the truth. He confesses the glory of His Person as Son of God, and declares that henceforth they should see the Son of man no longer in the meekness of One who would not break the bruised reed, but coming in the clouds of heaven, and sitting on the right hand of power. Having born this testimony He is condemned on account of that which He said of Himself — for the confession of the truth. The false witnesses did not succeed. The priests and the heads of Israel were guilty of His death, by virtue of their own rejection of the testimony He rendered to the truth. He was the Truth; they were under the power of the father of lies. They rejected the Messiah, the Savior of His people. He would come to them no more, except as Judge.

[\* I purpose speaking on the Lord's sufferings when studying the Gospel of Luke, where they are described more in detail; because it is as Son of man that He is there especially presented.]

[\*\* Remark here in so solemn and crucial a moment, the place that the Lord gives to the scriptures: that thus it must be, for it was there (v. 54). They are the word of God.]

They insult and outrage Him. Each one alas! takes, as we have seen, his own place — Jesus, that of Victim; the others, the place of betrayal, rejection, abandonment, denial of the Lord. What a picture! What a solemn moment! Who could stand in it? Christ alone could steadily pass through it. And He passed through it as a victim. As such, He must be stripped of all, and that in the presence of God. Everything else disappeared, except the sin which led to it; and, according to grace, that also before the powerful efficacy of this act. Peter, self-confident, hesitating, detected, answering with untruth, swearing, denies his Master; and, painfully convinced of man's powerlessness against the enemy of his soul and against sin, he goes out and weeps bitterly: tears, which cannot efface his guilt, but which, while proving the existence, through grace, of uprightness of heart, bear witness to that powerlessness which uprightness of heart cannot remedy.\*

[\* I think it will be found, on comparing the Gospels, that the Lord was examined at Caiaphas's over night, when Peter denies Him, and that they met formally again in the morning, and, asking the blessed Lord, received from Himself the confession on which they led Him to Pilate. Over night it was only the active leaders. In the morning there was a formal assembling of the Sanhedrim.]

After this (chap. 27), the unhappy priests and heads of the people deliver up their Messiah to the Gentiles, as He had told His disciples. Judas, in despair under Satan's power, hangs himself, having cast the reward of his iniquity at the feet of the chief priests and elders. Satan was forced to bear witness, even by a conscience that he had betrayed, to the Lord's innocence. What a scene! Then the priests, who had made no conscience of buying His blood from Judas, scruple to put the money into the treasury of the temple, because it was the price of blood. In the presence of that which was going on, man was obliged to show himself as he is and the power of Satan over him. Having taken counsel, they buy a burying-ground for strangers. These were profane enough in their eyes for that, provided they themselves were not defiled with such money. Yet it was the time of God's grace to the stranger, and judgment on Israel. Moreover they established thereby a perpetual memorial of their own sin, and of the blood which has been shed. Aeldama is all that remains in this world of the circumstances of this great sacrifice. The world is a field of blood, but it speaks better things than that of Abel.

This prophecy, we know, is in the book of Zechariah. The name "Jeremiah" may have crept into the text when there was nothing more than "by the prophet"; or it might be because Jeremiah stood first in the order prescribed by the Talmudists for the books of prophecy; for which reason, very likely, also, they said, "Jeremiah, or one of the prophets," as in chapter 16:14. But this is not the place for discussion on the subject.

Their own part in the Jewish scene closes. The Lord stands before Pilate. Here the question is not whether He is the Son of God, but whether He is the King of the Jews. Although He was this, yet it was only in the character of Son of God that He would allow the Jews to receive Him. Had they received Him as the Son of God, He would have been their King. But that might not be: He must accomplish the work of atonement. Having rejected Him as Son of God, the Jews now deny Him as their King. But the Gentiles also become guilty in the person of their head in Palestine, the

government of which had been committed to them. The Gentile head should have reigned in righteousness. His representative in Judea acknowledged the malice of Christ's enemies; his conscience, alarmed by his wife's dream, seeks to evade the guilt of condemning Jesus. But the true prince of this world, as regards present exercise of dominion, was Satan. Pilate, washing his hands (futile attempt to exonerate himself), delivers up the guiltless to the will of His enemies, saying, at the same time, that he finds no fault in Him. And he releases to the Jews a man guilty of sedition and murder, instead of the Prince of life. But it was again on His own confession, and that only, that He was condemned, confessing the same thing in the Gentile court as He had done in the Jewish, in each the truth, witnessing a good confession of what concerned the truth as to those before whom He was.

Barabbas,\* the expression of the spirit of Satan who was a murderer from the beginning, and of rebellion against the authority which Pilate was there to maintain — Barabbas was loved by the Jews; and with him, the wrongful carelessness of the governor, who was powerless against evil, endeavored to satisfy the will of the people whom he ought to have governed “All the people” make themselves guilty of the blood of Jesus in the solemn word, which remains fulfilled to this day, till sovereign grace, according to God's purpose, takes it off — solemn but terrible word, “His blood be upon us and upon our children.” Sad and frightful ignorance which self-will has brought upon a people who rejected the light! Alas! how each one, I again say, takes his own place in the presence of this touchstone — a rejected Savior. The company of the Gentiles, the soldiers, do that in derision, with the brutality habitual to them as heathen and as executioners, which the Gentiles shall do with joyful worship, when He whom they now mocked shall be truly the King of the Jews in glory. Jesus endures it all. It was the hour of His submission to the full power of evil. patience must have its perfect work, in order that His obedience may be complete on every side. He bore it all without relief, rather than fail in obedience to His Father. What a difference between this and the conduct of the first Adam surrounded with blessings!

[\* Strange to say, this means son of Abba, as if Satan was mocking them with the name.]

Every one must be the servant of sin, or of the tyranny of wickedness, at this solemn hour, in which all is put to the proof. They compel one Simon (known afterwards, it appears, among the disciples) to bear the cross of Jesus; and the Lord is led away to the place of His crucifixion. There He refuses that which might have stupefied Him. He will not shun the cup He had to drink, nor deprive Himself of His faculties in order to be insensible to that which it was the will of God He should suffer. The prophecies of the Psalms are fulfilled in His Person, by means of those who little thought what they were doing. At the same time, the Jews succeeded in becoming to the last degree contemptible. Their King was hung. They must bear the shame in spite of themselves. Whose fault was it? But, hardened and senseless, they share with a malefactor the miserable satisfaction of insulting the Son of God, their King, the Messiah, to their own ruin, and quote, so blinding is unbelief, from their own scriptures, as the expression of their own mind, that which in them is put into the mouth of the unbelieving enemies of Jehovah. Jesus felt it all; but the anguish of His trial, where after all He was a calm and faithful witness, the abyss of His sufferings, contained something far more terrible than all this malice or abandonment of man. The floods doubtless lifted up their voices.\* One after another the waves of wickedness dashed against Him; but the depths beneath that awaited Him, who could fathom? His heart, His soul — the vessel of a divine love — could alone go deeper than the bottom of that abyss which sin had opened for man, to bring up those who lay there, after He had endured its pains in His own soul. A heart that had been ever faithful was forsaken of God. Where sin had brought man, love brought the Lord, but with a nature and an apprehension in which there was no distance, no separation, so that it should be felt in all its fullness. No one but He who was in that place could fathom or feel it.

[\* We find in Matthew, specially collected, the dishonor done to the Lord and the insults offered Him, and with Mark the forsaking of God.]

It is too a wonderful spectacle to see the one righteous man in the world declare at the end of His life He was forsaken of God. But thus it was He glorified Him as none else could have done it, and where none but He could have done it — made sin, in the presence of God as such, with no veil to hide, no mercy to cover or bear it with.

The fathers, full of faith, had in their distress experienced the faithfulness of God, who answered the expectation of their hearts. But Jesus (as to the condition of His soul at that moment) cried in vain. “A worm and no man” before the eyes of men, He had to bear the forsaking of the God in whom He trusted.

Their thoughts far from His, they that surround Him did not even understand His words, but they accomplished the prophecies by their ignorance. Jesus, bearing testimony by the loudness of His voice that it was not the weight of death that oppressed Him, gives up the ghost.

The efficacy of His death is presented to us in this Gospel in a double aspect. First, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. God, who had been always hidden behind the veil, discovered Himself completely by means of the death of Jesus. The entrance into the holy place is made manifest — a new and living way which God has consecrated for us through the veil. The entire Jewish system, the relations of man with God under its sway, its priesthood, all fell with the rending of the veil. Every one found himself in the presence of God without a veil between. The priests were to be always in His presence. But, by this same act, the sin, which would have made it impossible for us to stand there, was for the believer entirely put away from before God. The holy God, and the believer, cleansed from his sins, are brought together by the death of Christ. What love was that which accomplished this!

Secondly, besides this, such was the efficacy of His death, that when His resurrection had burst the bonds that held them, many of the dead appeared in the city — witnesses of His power who, having suffered death, had risen above it, and overcome it, and destroyed its power, or taken it into His own hands. Blessing was now in resurrection.

The presence therefore of God without a veil, and sinners without sin before Him, prove the efficacy of Christ’s sufferings.

The resurrection of the dead, over whom the king of terrors had no more right, displayed the efficacy of the death of Christ for sinners, and the power of His resurrection. Judaism is over for those that have faith, and the power of death also. The veil is rent. The grave gives up its prey; He is Lord of the dead and of the living.\*

[\* The glory of Christ in ascension, and as Lord of all, does not come within the scope of Matthew historically.]

There is yet another especial testimony to the mighty power of His death, to the import of that word, “If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me.” The centurion who was on guard at the crucifixion of the Lord, seeing the earthquake and those things that were done, trembling, confesses the glory of His Person; and, stranger as he is to Israel, renders the first testimony of faith among Gentiles: “Truly this was the Son of God.”

But the narrative goes on. Some poor women — to whom devotedness often gives, on God’s part, more courage than to men in their more responsible and busy position — were standing near the cross, beholding what was done to Him they loved.\*

[\* The part that women take in all this history is very instructive, especially to them. The activity of public service, that which may be called “work,” belongs naturally to men (all that appertains to what is generally termed ministry), although women share a very precious activity in private. But there is another side of christian life which is particularly theirs; and that is personal and loving devotedness to Christ. It is a woman, who anointed the Lord while the disciples murmured; women, who were at the cross, when all except John had forsaken Him; women, who came to the sepulchre, and who were sent to announce the truth to the apostles who had gone after all to their own home; women, who ministered to the Lord’s need. And indeed this goes farther. Devotedness in service is perhaps the part of man; but the instinct of affection, that which enters more intimately into Christ’s position, and is thus more immediately in connection with His sentiments, in closer communion with the sufferings of His heart — this is the part of woman: assuredly a happy part. The activity of service for Christ puts man a little out of this position, at least if the Christian is not watchful. Everything has however its place. I speak of that which is characteristic; for there are women who have served much, and men who have felt much. Note also here, what I believe I have remarked, that this clinging of heart to Jesus is the position where the communications of true knowledge are received. The first full gospel is announced to the poor woman that was a sinner who washed His feet, the embalming for His death to Mary, our highest position to Mary Magdalene, the communion Peter desired to John who was in His bosom. And here the women have a large share.]

But they were not the only ones who filled the place of the terrified disciples. Others — and this often happens — whom the world had held back, when once the depth of their affection is stirred by the question of His sufferings whom they really loved, when the moment is so painful that others are terrified, then (emboldened by the rejection of Christ) they feel

that the time is arrived for decision and become fearless confessors of the Lord. Hitherto associated with those that have crucified Him, they must now either accept that act, or declare themselves. Through grace they do the latter.

God had prepared all beforehand. His Son was to have His tomb with the rich. Joseph comes boldly to Pilate and asks for the body of Jesus. He wraps the body, which Pilate grants him, in a clean linen cloth, and lays it in his own sepulchre, which had never served to hide the corruption of man. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary\* for they were known — sat near the sepulchre, bound by all that remained to their faith of Him whom they had loved and followed with adoration during His life.

[\* That is, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, and mother of James and Joses, constantly spoken of as “the other Mary.” In John 19:25, Mary the wife of Cleophas has been taken as in apposition with His mother’s sister. But this is simply a mistake. It is another person. There were four — three Marys and His mother’s sister.]

But unbelief has no faith in itself, and, fearing lest that which it denies be true, it mistrusts everything. The chief priests request Pilate to guard the sepulchre, in order to frustrate any attempt the disciples might make to found the doctrine of the resurrection on the absence of the body of Jesus from the tomb in which it had been laid. Pilate bids them secure the sepulchre themselves; so that all they did was to make themselves involuntary witnesses to the fact, and assure us of the accomplishment of the thing they dreaded. Thus Israel was guilty of this effort of futile resistance to the testimony which Jesus had rendered to His own resurrection. They were a testimony against themselves to its truth. The precautions which Pilate would not perhaps have taken they carried to the extreme, so that all mistake as to the fact of His resurrection was impossible.

The Lord’s resurrection is briefly related in Matthew. The object is again, after the resurrection, to connect the ministry and service of Jesus — now transferred to His disciples — with the poor of the flock, the remnant of Israel. He again assembled them in Galilee, where He had constantly instructed them, and where the despised among the people dwelt afar from the pride of the Jews. This connected their work with His, in that which especially characterised it with reference to the remnant of Israel.

I shall examine the details of the resurrection elsewhere Here I only consider its bearing in this Gospel. The sabbath ended (Saturday evening with us — chap. 28), the two Marys come to see the sepulchre. At this moment that was all they did. Verses 1, 2 are not consecutive, 2-4 go together. When the earthquake and its attendant circumstances took place, no one was there except the soldiers. At night all was secure. The disciples knew nothing of it in the morning. When the women arrived at dawn, the angel who sat at the door of the sepulchre re-assured them with the tidings of the Lord's resurrection. The angel of the Lord had come down and opened the door of the tomb, which man had closed with every possible precaution.\* They had in truth only guaranteed by unexceptionable witnesses the truth of the apostles' preaching, by placing the soldiers there. The women, by their visit the evening before, and in the morning when the angel spoke to them, received a full assurance to faith of the fact of His resurrection. All that is presented here is the facts. The women had been there in the evening. The intervention of the angel certified to the soldiers the true character of His coming forth from the tomb; and the visit of the women in the morning established the fact of His resurrection as an object of faith to themselves. They go and announce it to the disciples, who — so far from having done that which the Jews imputed to them — did not even believe the assertions of the women. Jesus Himself appears to the women who were returning from the sepulchre, having believed the words of the angel.

[\* But I apprehend the Lord Jesus had left the tomb before the stone was rolled away; that was for mortal eyes.]

As I have already said, Jesus connects Himself with His former work among the poor of the flock, afar from the seat of Jewish tradition, and from the temple, and from all that linked the people with God according to the old covenant. He appoints His disciples to meet Him there, and there they find Him and recognise Him; and it is there, in this former scene of the labors of Christ, according to Isaiah 8 and 9, that they receive their commission from Him. Hence we have not the ascension of Christ at all in this Gospel, but all power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth, and accordingly the commission given to His disciples extends to all nations (Gentiles). To them they were to proclaim His rights, and make disciples of them.



It was not however the name of the Lord only, nor in connection with His throne at Jerusalem. Lord of heaven and earth, His disciples were to proclaim Him throughout all nations, founding their doctrine on the confession of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. They were to teach, not the law, but the precepts of Jesus. He would be with them, with the disciples who thus confessed Him, unto the end of the age. It is this which connects all that will be accomplished until Christ sits upon the great white throne with the testimony that He Himself rendered on the earth in the midst of Israel. It is the testimony of the kingdom, and of its Head, once rejected by a people that knew Him not. It links the testimony to the nations with a remnant in Israel owning Jesus as Messiah but now risen from the dead, as He had said, but not to a Christ known as ascended on high. Nor does it present Jesus alone, nor Jehovah, as any longer the subject of testimony, but the revelation of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost as the holy name by which the nations were connected with God.

## MARK

The Gospel according to Mark has a character that differs in certain respects from all the others. Each Gospel, as we have seen, has its own character; each is occupied with the Person of the Lord in a different point of view: as a divine Person, the Son of God; as the Son of man; as the Son of David, the Messiah presented to the Jews, Emmanuel. But Mark is occupied with none of these titles. It is the Servant we find here — and in particular His service as bearing the word — the active service of Christ in the gospel. The glory of His divine Person shows itself, it is true, in a remarkable manner through His service, and, as it were, in spite of Himself, so that He avoids its consequences. But still service is the subject of the book. Doubtless we shall find the character of His teaching developing itself (and truth consequently shaking off the Jewish forms under which it had been held), as well as the account of His death, on which all depended for the establishment of faith. But that which distinguishes this Gospel is the character of service and of Servant that is attached to the life of Jesus — the work that He came to accomplish personally as living on the earth. On this account the history of His birth is not found in Mark. It opens with the announcement of the beginning of the gospel. John the Baptist is the herald, the forerunner, of Him who brought this good news to man.

The message is new — at least in the absolute and complete character it assumes, and in its direct and immediate application. It was not the Jewish privileges which should be obtained by repenting and returning to the Lord. The Lord was coming according to His promise. To prepare His way before Him, John was preaching repentance for the remission of sins. It was this they needed: remission of sins for the repentant was the great thing, the formal object of John's mission.

Repentance and remission of sins refer clearly to the responsibility of man, here of Israel, in his natural standing with God; and clearing that as to man's state relatively to God, morally and responsibly qualify him for the reception of purposed blessing — morally in that he judges the sins in principle as God does, and responsibly by God's forgiving them all. Hence

also remission is necessarily a present actual thing. There is a governmental forgiveness as well as a justifying one, but the principle is the same, and the latter is the basis of the former. Only where it is governmental it may be accompanied by various accompanying dealings of God, only the sin is no longer imputed as to present relationship with God, as in justifying, this is eternally true. In justifying forgiveness as in Romans 4, showing by its use of Psalm 32, the common character of non-imputation — it is founded on the work of Christ, and hence is absolute and unchangeable. Sin is not imputed and never can be, because the work is done and finished which puts it away out of God's sight: that — eternal, absolute, and immutable in itself — is the basis of all God's dealings with man in grace. Grace reigns through righteousness. Hebrews 9, 10 unfolds this, where the conscience and coming to God, and that in the holiest, are concerned. So Romans 3-5, where the question is judicial, a matter of judgment, wrath, and justifying. It is the basis of blessings, not the end, great as it is in itself — peace with God and reconciliation. Here it was the ground of all the blessings Israel will have by the new covenant (founded on Christ's death), but being rejected, those who believed entered into better and heavenly blessings. In Exodus 32:14, 34, we get governmental forgiveness, not justifying. In the case of David's great sin, it was pardoned when owned, the iniquity of it put away, but severe chastisement connected with it because he had given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. God's glory in righteousness had to be maintained before the world (2 Samuel 12:13, 14).

Here it was a proposal of present forgiveness to Israel, which will be accomplished in the last days; and then, as their long rejection will have closed in governmental forgiveness, they will also through the death and blood-shedding of Christ at least the remnant, be forgiven and justified for the enjoyment of the promises under the new covenant (compare Acts 3).

The prophets had indeed announced pardon if the people returned to the Lord; but here it was the present object of the address. The people go out in a body to avail themselves of it. Conscience at least was stirred; and whatever might be the pride of their leaders, the sense of Israel's condition was felt by the people, as soon as anything outside the routine of religion acted on the heart and conscience — that is to say, when God spoke. They confess their sins. With some perhaps it was only natural conscience, that

is, not a really quickening work; but at any rate it was wrought upon by the testimony of God.

But John, rigidly separate from the people, and living apart from human society, proclaims another, mightier than he, whose shoe-latchet he was not worthy to unloose: He would not merely preach repentance accepted by the baptism of water; He would bestow the Holy Ghost, power, on those who received His testimony. Here our Gospel passes on rapidly to the service of Him whom John thus declared. It only sets forth summarily that which introduces Him into this service.

The Lord takes His place among the repentant of His people, and, submitting to John's baptism, He sees heaven open to Him, and the Holy Ghost descending upon Him like a dove. The Father acknowledges Him as His Son on earth, in whom He is well pleased. He is then led by the Holy Ghost into the wilderness, where He undergoes the temptation of Satan for forty days; He is with the wild beasts, and angels exercise their ministry towards Him. Here we see His whole position — the character which the Lord takes on earth — all its features and relations with that which surrounded Him, gathered into these two or three verses. It has been treated of in its details in Matthew.

After this John disappears from the scene, giving place to the public ministry of Christ, of whom he was only the herald; and Christ Himself appears in the place of testimony, declaring that the time was fulfilled; that it was now no question of prophecies or of days to come; that God was going to set up His kingdom, and that they ought to repent and receive the good news which at that very moment was proclaimed to them.

Our evangelist passes\* rapidly on to every branch of the service of Christ. Having presented the Lord as undertaking the public ministry which called on men to receive the good news as a present thing (the time of the fulfillment of the ways of God being come), he exhibits Him as calling others to accomplish this same work in His name by following Him. His word does not fail in its effect. those whom He calls forsake all and follow Him.\*\* He goes into the city to teach on the sabbath-day. His word does not consist of arguments which evidence the uncertainty of man, but comes with the authority of One who knows the truth which He proclaims — authority which in fact was that of God, who can communicate truth.

He speaks also as One who possesses it; and He gives proof that He does. The word, which thus presents itself to men, has power over demons. A man possessed by an evil spirit was there. The evil spirit bore testimony, in spite of himself, to Him who spake, and whose presence was insupportable to him; but the word that aroused him had power to cast him out. Jesus rebukes him — commands him to hold his peace and to come out of the man; and the evil spirit, after manifesting the reality of his presence and his malice, submits, and departs from the man. Such was the power of the word of Christ. It is not surprising that the fame of this act should spread through all the country; but the Lord continues His path of service wherever work presented itself. He goes into the house of Peter, whose wife's mother lay sick of a fever. He heals her immediately; and when the sabbath was ended, they bring Him all the sick. He, ever ready to serve, (precious Lord!) heals them all.

[\* This rapidity characterises Mark, as does the word "immediately."

[\*\* It is the fact in itself which is given here, as also in Matthew. Luke's account will give occasion to enter more into detail as to the call of the disciples. From John the Baptist's days they had been more or less associated with the Lord — at least these had.]

But it was not to surround Himself with a crowd that the Lord labored; and in the morning, long before day, He departs into the wilderness to pray. Such was the character of His service — wrought in communion with His God and Father, and in dependence upon Him. He goes alone into a solitary place. The disciples find Him, and tell Him that all are seeking Him; but His heart is in His work. The general desire does not bring Him back. He goes on His way to fulfill the work which was given Him to do — preaching the truth among the people; for this was the service to which He devoted Himself.

But, however devoted to this service, His heart was not made rigid by pre-occupation; He was always Himself with God. A poor leper comes to Him, acknowledging His power, but uncertain as to His will, as to the love that wielded that power. Now this dreadful disease not only shut the man himself out, but defiled every one who even touched the sufferer. But nothing stops Jesus in the service to which His love calls Him. The leper was wretched, an outcast from his fellow-creatures and from society, and excluded from Jehovah's house. But the power of God was present. The

leper must be re-assured as to the goodwill on which his dejected heart could not reckon. Who would care for such a wretch as he? He had faith as to the power that was in Christ; but his thoughts of himself concealed from him the extent of the love that had visited him. Jesus puts forth His hand and touches him.

The lowliest of men approaches sin, and that which was the token of sin, and dispels it; the Man, who in the might of His love touched the leper without being defiled, was the God who alone could remove the leprosy which made one afflicted with it miserable and outcast.

The Lord speaks with an authority that declares at once His love and His divinity: "I will, be thou clean." I will — here was the love of which the leper doubted, the authority of God who alone has the right to say I WILL. The effect followed the expression of His will. This is the case when God speaks. And who healed leprosy except Jehovah only? Was He the One who had come down low enough to touch this defiled being that defiled every other that had to do with him? Yes, the only One; but it was God who had come down, love which had reached so low, and which, in thus doing, showed itself mighty for every one that trusted in it. It was undefilable purity in power, and which could therefore minister in love to the vilest and delights to do so. He came to defiled man, not to be defiled by the contact, but to remove the defilement. He touched the leper in grace, but the leprosy was gone.

He hides Himself from human acclamations, and bids the man who had been healed to go and show himself to the priests according to the law of Moses. But this submission to the law, bore testimony in fact to His being Jehovah, for Jehovah alone, under the law, sovereignly cleansed the leper. The priest was but the witness that it had been done. This miracle being noised abroad, by attracting the multitude, sends Jesus away into the wilderness. Afterwards (chap. 2) He goes again into the city, and immediately the multitude gather together. What a living picture of the Lord's life of service! He preaches to them. This was His object and His service (see chap. 1:38). But again, in devoting Himself to the humble accomplishment of it as committed to Him, His service itself, His love — for who serves like God when He deigns to do it? — bring out His divine rights. He knew the real source of all these evils, and He could bring in its

remedy. "Thy sins," said He to the poor paralytic man, who was brought to Him with a faith that overcame difficulties, persevering in spite of them — that perseverance of faith which is fed by the sense of want, and certainty that power is to be found in Him who is sought — "thy sins are forgiven thee." To the reasoning of the scribes He gives an answer that silenced every gainsayer. He exercises the power that authorised Him to pronounce the pardon of the poor sufferer.\* The murmuring of the scribes brought out doctrinally who was there; as the verdict of the priests, who pronounce the leper clean, put the seal of their authority upon the truth that Jehovah, the healer of Israel, was there. That which Jesus carries on is His work, His testimony. The effect is to make it manifest that Jehovah is there, and has visited His people. It is Psalm 103 which is fulfilled, with respect to the rights and the revelation of the Person of Him who wrought.

[\* We must distinguish between governmental forgiveness, and absolute pardon of sins. Only, such as man is, there could not have been the former without the latter. But till Christ was rejected and had died this was not fully brought out.]

Jesus leaves the city; the people flock around Him; and again He teaches them. The call of Levi gives occasion for a new development of His ministry. He was come to call sinners, and not the righteous. After this He tells them that He could not put the new divine energy, unfolded in Himself, into the old forms of Pharisaism. And there was another reason for it the presence of the Bridegroom. How could the children of the bridechamber fast while the Bridegroom was with them? He should be taken from them, and then would be the time to fast. He proceeds to insist on the incompatibility between the old Jewish vessels and the power of the gospel. The latter would but subvert Judaism, to which they sought to attach it. That which took place when the disciples went through the cornfields confirms this doctrine.

Ordinances lost their authority in the presence of the King ordained of God, rejected and a pilgrim on the earth. Moreover the sabbath — a sign of the covenant between God and the Jews — was made for man, and not man for the sabbath; therefore He, the Son of man, was Lord of the sabbath. As Son of David rejected, the ordinances lost their force, and were subordinate to Him. As Son of man possessor (in the sight of God) of all the rights which God had bestowed on man, He was Lord of the sabbath,

which was made for man. In principle the old things were passed away. But this was not all. It was in fact the new things of grace and power, which did not admit of the old order of things. But the question was, whether God could act in grace, and bestow blessing, in sovereignty, on His people — whether He must submit to the authority of men availing themselves of His ordinances against His goodness, or do good according to His own power and love as being above all. Was man to limit the operation of God's goodness? And this, in truth, was the new wine which the Lord brought to man.

Such was the question raised in the synagogue (chap. 3) on the occasion of the man with the withered hand. The Lord sets it publicly before their conscience; but neither heart nor conscience answered Him; and He acts in His service according to the goodness and rights of God, and heals the man.\* The Pharisees and their enemies, the Herodians — for all were against God and united in this — consult together how they might destroy Christ. Jesus departs to the sea-coast of the sea of Tiberias. There the multitude follow Him, because of all that He had done; so that He is obliged to have a boat, that He may be outside the crowd. Spirits are subject to Him, compelled to own that He is the Son of God; but He forbids them to make Him known.

[\* One cannot but see how the old system, based on what man ought to be for God, is being set aside for what God is for man. But, the former having been established by God, nothing but the words and works of Jesus would have justified the Jews in giving it up. As it was, it was clearly opposition and hatred to the full revelation of Him who had ordained the other. Compare John 15:22, 24.]

Service in preaching, and in seeking souls, in devoting Himself to all, showing Himself by His acts to be the possessor of divine power, hiding Himself from the notice of men, in order to fulfill, apart from their applause, the service He had undertaken — such was His human life on earth. Love and divine power were disclosed in the service which that love impelled Him to accomplish, and in the accomplishment of which that power was exercised. But this could not be circumscribed by Judaism, however subject the Lord was to the ordinances of God given to the Jews.

But, God being thus manifested, the carnal opposition of man soon shows itself.\* Here, then, the description of Christ's service ends, and its effect is



manifested. This effect is developed in that which soon follows, with respect both to the iniquity of man and to the counsels of God. Meanwhile the Lord appoints twelve of His disciples to accompany Him, and to go forth preaching in His name. He could, not merely work miracles but, communicate to others the power to work them, and that by way of authority. He goes back into the house, and the multitude re-assemble. And here the thoughts of man display themselves at the same time as those of God. His friends search for Him as one who was beside Himself. The scribes, possessing influence as learned men, attribute to Satan a power which they could not deny. The Lord answers them by showing that in general all sin could be pardoned; but that to acknowledge the power, and attribute it to the enemy, rather than own Him who wielded it, was taking the place not of ignorant unbelief but of adversaries, thus blaspheming against the Holy Ghost — was a sin that could never be pardoned. The “strong man” was there; but Jesus was stronger than he, for He cast out the devils. Would Satan endeavor to overthrow his own house? The fact that the power of Jesus manifested itself in this manner left them without excuse. God’s “strong man” was then come: Israel rejected Him; and, as regards their leaders, by blaspheming against the Holy Ghost, they brought themselves under hopeless condemnation. The Lord therefore immediately distinguishes the remnant who received His word from all natural connection He had with Israel. His mother or His “brethren” are the disciples who stand around Him, and those who do the will of God. This really sets aside Israel at that time.

[\* This is the secret of all the history of Jesus, Son of David. All the promises being in Him for the Jews, the servant of every want too and every sorrow, yet being God and God manifested in Him, man could not bear it. The mind of the flesh is enmity against God.]

**CHAPTER 4.** This introduces the true character and result of His own service, and all the history of the service that should be accomplished unto a far distant future; as well as the responsibility of His disciples, with regard to the share they would have in it, and the quietness of one who trusted in God while thus laboring; the storms also that should occur, that should exercise faith while Jesus apparently took no notice of them; and the just confidence of faith, as well as the power that sustained it.

The whole character of the work at that moment, and until the Lord's return, is described in this fourth chapter.

The Lord resumes in it His habitual work of instruction, but in connection with the development that had just taken place of His relationship with the Jews. He sows. Fruit He no longer sought in His vineyard. In verse 11 we see that the distinction between the Jews and His disciples is marked. To the latter it was given to know the mystery of the kingdom, but to those that were without all these things were done in parables. I do not repeat the remarks I made in speaking of the contents of this parable in Matthew. But that which follows in verse 21 belongs essentially to the Gospel by Mark. We have seen that the Lord was occupied in preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and He committed the preaching of this gospel to others also. He was a sower, and He sowed the word. That was His service, and it was theirs likewise. But is a candle lit to be hidden? Moreover nothing should be hidden. If man did not manifest the truth he had received, God would manifest all things. Let every one take heed to it.

In verse 24 He applies this principle to His disciples. They must take heed to what they heard, for God would act towards them according to their fidelity in the administration of the word committed to them. The love of God sent the word of grace and of the kingdom unto men. That it should reach their conscience was the object of the service committed to the disciples. Christ communicated it to them; they were to make it known to others in all its fullness. According to the measure with which they gave free course to this testimony of love (conformably to the gift they had received), so should it be measured unto them in the government of God. If they hearkened unto that which He communicated to them, they should receive more; for, as a general principle, he who made that which reached him his own should have yet more, and from him who did not truly make it his own it should be taken away.

The Lord then shows them how it should be with regard to Himself. He had sown, and, even as the seed springs up and grows without any act on the sower's part, so would Christ allow the gospel to spread in the world without interposing in any apparent way, it being the peculiar character of the kingdom that the King was not there. But, when harvest time comes, the sower has again to-do with it. So should it be with Jesus: He would

return to look after the harvest. He was personally engaged in the sowing and in the harvest. In the interval, all went on apparently as if left to itself, really without the interference of the Lord in Person.

The Lord makes use of another similitude to describe the character of the kingdom. The small seed that He sowed should become a great system, highly exalted in the earth, capable of affording temporal protection to those that took shelter in it. Thus we have the work of preaching the word; the responsibility of the laborers to whom the Lord would entrust it during His absence; His own action at the beginning and at the end, at seed-time and at harvest, Himself remaining at a distance during the interval; and the formation of a great earthly power as the result of the truth which He preached, and which created a little nucleus around Himself. One part of the history of His followers was yet to be shown. They should find most serious difficulties in their way. The enemy would raise up a storm against them. Apparently Christ took no notice of their situation. They call upon Him, and awake Him by cries, which He answers in grace. He speaks to the wind and the sea, and there is a great calm. At the same time He rebukes their unbelief. They should have counted on Him and on His divine power, and not have thought that He was going to be swallowed up by the waves. They should have remembered their own connection with Him — that, by grace, they were associated with Him. What tranquillity was His! the storm does not disturb Him. Devoted to His work, He took His rest at the moment when service did not require His activity. He rested during the passage. His service only afforded Him those moments snatched by circumstances from labor. His divine tranquillity, which knew no distrust, allowed Him to sleep during the storm. It was not so with the disciples; and, forgetful of His power, unaware of the glory of Him who was with them, they think only of themselves, as though Jesus had forgotten them. One word on His part displays in Him the Lord of creation. This is the real state of the disciples when Israel is set aside. The storm arises. Jesus appears to take no heed. Now faith would have recognised that they were in the same ship with Him. That is to say, if Jesus leaves the seed He has sown to grow until the harvest, He is, none the less, in the same vessel; He shares, not the less truly, the lot of His followers, or rather they share His. The dangers are the danger He and His work are in. That is, there is really none. And how great is the foolishness

of unbelief. Think of their supposing, when the Son of God is come into the world to accomplish redemption and the settled purposes of God, that by, to man's eye, an accidental storm, He and all His work should be unexpectedly sunk in the lake! We are, blessed be His name, in the same boat with Him. If the Son of God does not sink, neither shall we.

But, in another sense, they are not with Him. They are called to serve, when He quits the scene of His labor. We learn this from the demoniac Legion (chap. 5), delivered from his miserable condition. Man — and Israel in particular — was completely under the power of the enemy. Christ, as to the work of His power, completely delivered the one in whose behalf this power was exercised. He is clothed — not naked — in his right mind, and sitting at the feet of Jesus to hear His words. But the people of the place are afraid, and send Jesus away — what the world has done with Christ; and in the history of the herd of swine we have the picture of Israel after the remnant has been healed. They are unclean, and Satan drives them to destruction. Now, when Jesus departs, he who had personally experienced the mighty effects of His love would have liked to be with Him; but he was to go home and bear testimony to those around him of all that Jesus had done. He was to serve in the absence of Jesus. In all these narratives we see the work and the devotedness of the Servant, but at the same time the divine power of Jesus manifested in this service.

In the circumstances that follow the cure of the demoniac, we find the true position of Jesus portrayed in His work. He is called upon to heal the daughter of Jairus — even as He came to heal the Jews, had that been possible. As He went toward the house of Jairus to perform this work, a poor incurable woman touches the hem of His garment with faith, and is instantly healed. This was the case with Jesus during His passage among the Jews. In the multitude that surrounded Him, some souls through grace touched Him by faith. In truth, their disease was in itself incurable; but Jesus had life in Himself according to the power of God, and faith drew out its virtue by touching Him. Such are brought to acknowledge their condition, but they are healed. Outwardly He was in the midst of all Israel — faith reaped the benefit in the sense of its own need and of the glory of His Person. Now, with respect to the one who was the object of His journey, remedy was unavailing. Jesus finds her dead, but does not miss the object of His journey. He raises her again, for He can give life. Thus

too with respect to Israel. On the way, those who had faith in Jesus were healed, incurable as they were in themselves; but in fact, as to Israel, the nation was dead in trespasses and sins. Apparently this put a stop to the work of Jesus. But grace will restore life to Israel in the end. We see the perfect grace of Jesus intercepting the effect of the bad tidings brought from the ruler's house. He says to Jairus, as soon as the messenger has told him of his daughter's death, and the inutility of troubling the Master any farther, "Be not afraid, only believe." In effect, although the Lord restores life to a dead Israel in the end of the ages, nevertheless it is by faith that it takes place. The case of the poor woman, although in its direct application it does not go beyond the Jews, yet applies in principle to the healing of every Gentile who, through grace, is brought to touch Jesus by faith.

This history then gives the character of His service, the manner in which — on account of man's condition — it had to be accomplished.

In that which follows, the history (properly so called) of His service is resumed (chap. 6). Only we see Him already rejected by a blinded people, in spite of the power which He had manifested, and which bore testimony to the glory of His Person. Nevertheless He pursues His service, and sends forth His disciples in order that no effort might be wanting; but with the testimony of the judgment that awaited those who should be guilty of the rejection of His mission — a rejection that was already taking place. The Lord however continues to give proof in mercy and in goodness that Jehovah, who had compassion on His people, was there; until at length He had to prepare His disciples for the certain result of His work, namely, His death by the hand of the Gentiles, to whom the chief priests would deliver Him.

To the Jews He was the carpenter, the son of Mary. Their unbelief stopped the beneficent hand of God with regard to themselves. Jesus carries on His work elsewhere, and sends forth His disciples — an act which implied the possession of divine power. It was still to Israel that the mission they received from Him directed them, and they were to pronounce judgment upon the land of Emmanuel, the land of Israel, as a polluted land, wherever their testimony should be rejected. They were to go forth resting on the mighty protection of Him who sent them, and they

should lack nothing. He was sovereign Lord: all things were at His disposal. Christ can not only communicate blessings as the channel of blessing Himself, but can also confer on His disciples the power of casting out devils. The disciples fulfill their task. This passage shows forth in a remarkable manner the position and glory of Christ. He is the servant — for men, the carpenter's son. In His new service, He takes no place but the filling up of that which God had given Him to do. He could do no mighty works there, because of their unbelief — ever ready to serve, but shut up, straitened in the exercise of His love, where no door opened to receive its influence; and nature judging according to sight never does. Only where a need was, His love, never tired, works — must work. The few sick folk profit by a love that despises none, because it never seeks itself.

But, in the following verse, He who could not work mighty works (because His service was dependent on divine conditions, on which God could found and carry on His intercourse with men, in order to reveal Himself) now gives power to others over all unclean spirits, a power which is divine. Any can work miracles, if God gives the power; but God alone can give it. They are to lack nothing, for Emmanuel was there; and to announce judgment if their message was rejected. Divine love had made Him entirely a dependent Servant; but the dependent Servant was God present in grace and righteousness.

But the effect of all these manifestations of power is, that the conscience of the king who then reigned in Israel is awakened; and the evangelist opens to us the history of the murderous opposition of the authorities in Israel to the witnesses for the truth. Herod had put John to death, in order to gratify the iniquity of a woman who pleased him — iniquity that he shared with her. A dance was worth the life of the prophet of God. Such was the ruler of Israel.

The apostles return. Jesus withdraws them from the inquisitive and needy crowd, by going into a desert place; but the multitude follow Him. Jesus, rejected as He is by the land He loved, has compassion on the poor of the flock, and manifests in their behalf the power of Jehovah to bless them according to Psalm 132. He satisfies the poor with bread. Having sent the people away, He crosses the sea on foot; and, rejoining His disciples, the wind ceases — a figure, of which we have spoken when meditating on

Matthew. Their work was finished. As to themselves, in spite of all His miracles, their hearts at that time were still hard, and forgot the miracles, one after the other. The Lord pursues His work of blessing. It was but to touch Him and be healed.

**CHAPTER 7.** The ruling power in exercise among the Jews had shown itself hostile to the testimony of God, and had put to death the one whom He had sent in the way of righteousness. The scribes, and those who pretended to follow righteousness, had corrupted the people by their teaching, and had broken the law of God.

They washed cups and pots, but not their hearts; and, provided that the priests — religion — gained by it, set aside the duties of children to their parents. But God looked at the heart, and from the heart of man proceeded every kind of impurity, iniquity, and violence. It was that which defiled the man, not having his hands unwashed. Such is the judgment on religiousness without conscience and without fear of God, and the true discernment of what the heart of man is in the sight of God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.

But God must also show His own heart; and if Jesus judged that of man with the eye of God — if He manifested His ways and His faithfulness to Israel; He displayed nevertheless through it all, what God was to those who felt their need of Him and came to Him in faith, owning and resting upon His pure goodness. From the land of Tyre and Sidon comes a woman of the condemned race, a Gentile and a Syrophenician. The Lord replies to her, on her request that He would heal her daughter, that the children (the Jews) must first be filled; that it was not right to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs: an overwhelming answer, if the sense she had of her need and of the goodness of God had not gone beyond, and set aside, every other thought. These two things made her humble of heart, and ready to own the sovereign favor of God towards the people of His choice in this world. Had He not a right to choose a people? And she was not one of them. But that did not destroy His goodness and His love. She was but a Gentile dog, yet such was the goodness of God that He had bread even for dogs. Christ, the perfect expression of God, the manifestation of God Himself in the flesh, could not deny His goodness and His grace, could not say that faith had higher thoughts of God than were true, for He was

Himself that love. The sovereignty of God was acknowledged — no pretension made to any right whatsoever. The poor woman rested only upon grace. Her faith, with an intelligence given of God, laid hold of the grace which went beyond the promises made to Israel. She penetrates into the heart of the God of love, as He is revealed in Jesus, even as He penetrates into ours, and she enjoys the fruit of it. For this was brought in now: God Himself directly in presence of and connection with man, and man as he was before God — not a rule or system for man to prepare himself for God.

In the next miracle, we see the Lord, by the same grace, bestowing hearing and speech upon a man who was deaf and unable even to express his thoughts. He could have received no fruit from the word, from God, and could give no praise to Him. The Lord is returned into the place where He arose as light on Israel; and here He deals with the remnant alone. He takes the man apart from the multitude. It is the same grace that takes the place of all pretensions to righteousness in man, and that manifests itself to the destitute. Its form, though exercised now in favor of the remnant of Israel, is suited to the condition of Jew or Gentile — it is grace. But as to these too it is the same: He takes the man apart from the crowd, that the work of God may be wrought: the crowd of this world had no real part therein. We see Jesus here, His heart moved at the condition of man, and more especially at the state of His ever-loved Israel, of which this poor sufferer was a striking picture. He causes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak. So was it individually, and so will it be with the whole remnant of Israel in the latter days. He acts Himself, and He does all things well. The power of the enemy is destroyed, the man's deafness, his inability to use his tongue as God gave it him, are taken away by His love who acts with the power of God.

The miracle of the loaves bore witness to the presence of the God of Israel, according to His promises; this, to the grace that went beyond the limits of these promises, on the part of God, who judged the condition of those who asserted a claim to them according to righteousness, and that of man, evil in himself; and who delivered man and blessed him in love, withdrawing him from the power of Satan, and enabling him to hear the voice of God, and to praise Him.



There are yet some remarkable features in this part of the history of Christ, which I desire to point out. They manifest the spirit in which Jesus labored at this moment. He departs from the Jews, having shown the emptiness and hypocrisy of their worship, and the iniquity of every human heart as a source of corruption and sin.

The Lord — at this solemn moment, which displayed the rejection of Israel — goes far away from the people to a place where there was no opportunity for service among them, to the borders of the stranger and Canaanite cities of Tyre and Sidon (chap. 7:24), and (His heart oppressed) would have no one know where He was. But God had been too plainly manifested in His goodness and His power, to allow Him to be hidden whenever there was need. The report of what He was had gone abroad, and the quick eye of faith discovered that which alone could meet its need. It is this that finds Jesus (when all, that had outwardly a right to the promises, are deceived by this pretension itself and by their privileges). Faith it is that knows its need, and knows that only, and that Jesus alone can meet it. That which God is to faith is manifested to the one that needs it, according to the grace and power that are in Jesus. Hidden from the Jews, He is grace to the sinner. Thus, also (chap. 7:33), when He heals the deaf man of his deafness and of the impediment in his speech, He takes him aside from the multitude, and looks up to heaven and sighs. Oppressed in His heart by the unbelief of the people, He takes the object of the exercise of His power aside, looks up to the sovereign Source of all goodness, of all help for man, and grieves at the thought of the condition in which man is found. This case then exemplifies more particularly, the remnant according to the election of grace from among the Jews, who are separated by divine grace from the mass of the nation, faith, in these few, being in exercise. The heart of Christ is far from repulsing His (earthly) people. His soul is overwhelmed by the sense of the unbelief that separates them from Him and from deliverance; nevertheless He takes away from some the deaf heart, and looses their tongue, in order that the God of Israel may be glorified.

Thus also on the death of Lazarus, Christ grieves at the sorrow which death brings upon the heart of man. There, however, it was a public testimony.

We shall find in chapter 8 another example of that which we have been noticing. Jesus leads the blind man out of the town. He does not forsake Israel wherever there is faith; but He separates the one who possesses it from the mass, and brings him into connection with the power, the grace, the heaven, whence blessing flowed — blessing consequently which extended to the Gentiles. Power was not exercised in the midst of manifest unbelief. This clearly marks out the position of Christ with regard to the people. He pursues His service, but He retires to God because of Israel's unbelief: but it is to the God of all grace. There His heart found refuge till the great hour of atonement.

It is on this account, as it appears to me, that we have (chap. 8) the second miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. The Lord acts again in favor of Israel, no longer as administering Messianic power in the midst of the people (which was implied, as we have seen, in the number twelve), but in spite of His rejection by Israel, continuing to exercise His power in a divine manner and apart from man. The number seven\* has always the force of superhuman perfection — that which is complete: this however applied to what is complete in the power of evil as well as good, when it is not human and subordinate to God. Here it is divine. It is that intervention of God which is unwearied, and which is according to His own power, which it is the principal object of the repetition of the miracle to display.

[\* It may be remarked that seven is the highest prime, that is indivisible, number; twelve, the most divisible there is.]

Afterwards the condition both of the heads of Israel and of the remnant is displayed. The Pharisees require a sign; but no sign should be given to that generation. It was simply unbelief when abundant proofs of who He was were before them; they were the very things which had led to the demand. The Lord departs from them. But the blind and unintelligent condition of the remnant is also manifested. The Lord warns them to beware of the spirit and the teaching of the Pharisees, the false pretenders to a holy zeal for God; and of the Herodians, the servile votaries of the spirit of the world, who, to please the emperor, set God entirely aside.

In using the word “leaven,” the Lord gives the disciples occasion to show their deficiency in spiritual intelligence. If the Jews learnt nothing from the Lord's miracles, but still asked for signs, even the disciples did not realise

the divine power manifested in them. I do not doubt that this condition is set forth in the blind man of Bethsaida.

Jesus takes him by the hand and leads him out of the town, away from the multitude, and uses that which was of Himself, that which possessed the efficacy of His own Person, to perform the cure.\* The first effect well depicts the condition of the disciples. They saw, doubtless, but in a confused manner, “men, as trees, walking.” But the Lord’s love is not wearied by their unbelieving dullness of intelligence; He acts according to the power of His own intention towards them, and causes them to see clearly. Afterwards — away from Israel — the uncertainty of unbelief is seen in juxtaposition with the certainty of faith (however obscure its intelligence may be), and Jesus, forbidding the disciples to speak of that which they certainly believed (the time was gone by for convincing Israel of Christ’s rights as Messiah), announces to them that which should happen to Himself, for the accomplishment of God’s purposes in grace as Son of man, after His rejection by Israel.\*\* So that everything is now, as we may say, in its place. Israel does not recognise the Messiah in Jesus; consequently He no longer addresses the people in that character. His disciples believe Him to be the Messiah, and He tells them of His death and resurrection.

[\* Spittle, in connection with the sanctity of the Rabbis, was highly esteemed by the Jews in this respect; but here its efficacy is connected with the Person of Him who used it.]

[\*\* We have nothing here of the church, nor of the keys of the kingdom These depend on what is not introduced here as a part of Peter’s confession — the Son of the living God. We have the glory of the kingdom coming in power, in contrast with the rejected Christ the prophet-servant in Israel.]

Now there may be (and it is a most important practical truth) true faith, without the heart being formed according to the full revelation of Christ, and without the flesh being practically crucified in proportion to the measure of knowledge one has of the object of faith. Peter acknowledged indeed, by the teaching of God, that Jesus was the Christ; but he was far from having his heart pure according to the mind of God in Christ. And when the Lord announces His rejection, humiliation and death, and that before all the world, the flesh of Peter — wounded by the idea of a Master thus despised and rejected — shews its energy by daring to rebuke the Lord Himself. This attempt of Satan’s to discourage the disciples by the

dishonor of the cross stirs up the Lord's heart. All His affection for His disciples, and the sight of those poor sheep before whom the enemy was putting a stumbling block, bring a vehement censure upon Peter, as being the instrument of Satan and speaking on his part. Alas for us! the reason was plain — he savored the things of men, and not those of God; for the cross comprises in itself all the glory of God. Man prefers the glory of man, and thus Satan governs him. The Lord calls the people and His disciples, and explains distinctly to them that if they would follow Him, they must take part with Him, and bear their cross. For thus, in losing their life, they would save it, and the soul was worth all beside. Moreover, if any one was ashamed of Jesus and of His words, the Son of man would be ashamed of him, when He should come in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. For glory belonged to Him, whatever might be His humiliation. He then sets this before His chief disciples, in order to strengthen their faith.

**CHAPTER 9.** In Matthew we saw the transfiguration announced in terms that related to the subject of that Gospel — the rejected Christ taking His glorious position as Son of man. In each of the Gospels it is in connection with the moment when this transition is clearly set forth; but in each case with a particular character. In Mark we have seen the humble and devoted service of Christ in proclaiming the kingdom, whatever might be the divine glory that shone through His humiliation. Accordingly the manifestation of the transition to glory is here announced as the coming of the kingdom in power. There is nothing that very particularly distinguishes the recital here from that in Matthew, excepting that the isolation of Jesus and the three disciples at this moment is more strongly marked in verse 2, and that the facts are related without addition. The Lord afterwards charges them to tell no one what they had seen, until after His resurrection from among the dead.

We may remark here, that it is indeed the kingdom in power that is manifested. It is not the power of the Holy Ghost bringing the sinner as a holy member of the body into connection with Christ the Head, revealing to it the heavenly glory of Christ as He is at the right hand of the Father. Christ is on earth. He is there in connection with the great witnesses of the Jewish economy (the law and prophecy), but witnesses who give place entirely to Him, while participating with Him in the glory of the kingdom.

But Christ is manifested in glory on the earth — the man in glory is recognised as Son of God, as He is known in the cloud. It was the glory as it shall be manifested on the earth, the glory of the kingdom, and God is still in the cloud, though revealing His glory in it. This is not our position as yet without a veil; only that the veil as to our relationship with God is rent from top to bottom, and we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Christ. But this is spiritual privilege, not public display our veil as to that, our body, is not rent; but Christ's, as the title of entrance, is.\*

[\* The entrance into the cloud does not form part of the revelation here. We find it in Luke. The cloud for Israel was the place where God dwelt; it was (Matthew 17) a bright cloud.]

But this position of glory could not be taken by the Lord, nor the glorious reign be established, excepting in a new order of things. Christ must rise from the dead to establish it. It did not accord with His presentation as Messiah, as He then was. Therefore He commands His disciples not to make it known till after His resurrection. It would then be a powerful confirmation of the doctrine of the kingdom in glory. This manifestation of the glory confirmed the faith of the disciples at that time (as Gethsemane taught them the reality of His sufferings, and of His conflicts with the prince of darkness); and would afterwards form a subject of their testimony, and its confirmation, when Christ should have taken His new position.

We may see the character of this manifestation, and its relation to the earthly kingdom of glory of which the prophets had spoken, in 2 Peter 1:19. Read there, "We have the word of prophecy confirmed."

The disciples had stopped at the threshold. In fact, although their eyes were opened, they saw "men as trees walking." What, they questioned between themselves, could this "rising from among the dead" mean? Resurrection was known to them; all the sect of the Pharisees believed in it. But this power which delivered from the condition in which man and even the saints were found, implying too that others were still left in it when that power was exercised, of this they were totally ignorant. That there was a resurrection in which God would raise up all the dead at the last day, they had no doubt. But that the Son of man was the resurrection and the life — the absolute triumph over death of the last Adam, the Son

of God having life in Himself, manifested by His resurrection from among the dead (a deliverance that shall be accomplished in the saints also in due time), of this they understood nothing. Doubtless they received the Lord's words as true, as having authority; but His meaning was incomprehensible to them.

Now unbelief never fails to find out difficulties that justify it in its own eyes which refuse to perceive the divine proofs of the truth — difficulties great enough in appearance, and which may trouble the minds of those who, through grace, are inclined to believe, or who have believed, but are still weak in the faith.

The prophets had said that Elias must first come. The scribes insisted on this. Struck with the glory that undeniably confirmed the pretensions of Christ, the disciples speak to Him of this difficulty. The conviction which the sight of the glory brought to their mind, made them confess the difficulty with regard to which they had previously been silent, not daring to bring it forward. But now the proof is strong enough to embolden them to face the difficulty.

In fact, the word spoke of it, and Jesus accepts it as the truth; Elias was to come and restore all things. And he shall indeed come before the manifestation of the glory of the Son of man; but first of all the Son of man must suffer and be rejected. This also was written, as well as the mission of Elias. Moreover, before this manifestation of Christ, which tested the Jews as to their responsibility, God had not failed to supply them with a testimony according to the spirit and power of Elias; and they had ill-treated him as they listed. It was written that the Son of man should suffer before His glory, as truly as that Elias should come. However, as we have said, in point of testimony to the Jews, he who took morally the place of Elias had come. They had treated him as they were going to treat the Lord. Thus also John had said that he was not Elias, and he quotes Isaiah 40, which speaks of the testimony; but he never quotes Malachi 4, which relates to Elias personally. The Lord (Matthew 11:10) applies Malachi 3:1; but John, Isaiah.

Come down from the mountain, the people rush towards Him, astonished apparently at this mysterious absence from His disciples, and salute Him with the reverence with which His whole life had inspired them. But that

which had taken place in His absence only confirmed the solemn truth that He must depart, which had just been demonstrated by a more glorious testimony. The remnant even, they who believed, knew not how to profit by the power which was now on earth. The faith of those even who believed did not realise the presence of the Messiah — the power of Jehovah, the Healer of Israel: wherefore then still remain among the people and the disciples? The poor father expresses his affliction in a touching manner, in words that show a heart brought by the sense of its need to a right condition, but very weak in faith. The miserable state of his child is related, and his heart presents a true picture of the condition of the remnant — faith that required support on account of the unbelief under which it was buried. Israel was in no better condition than the poor child. But power was present, capable of all things. That was not the difficulty. Is there faith to profit by it? was the question. “If thou canst,” said the afflicted father to Jesus. “If thou canst (replied the Lord) applies to thy faith; “if thou canst believe, all things are possible.” The poor father, true of heart, confesses his own state with grief, and seeks, in the goodness of Christ, help for his failure. Thus the position of Israel was plainly shown forth. Almighty power was present to heal them to deliver them from the power of Satan. It was to be done through faith, for the soul was to return to God. And there was faith in those who, touched by the testimony of His power, and moved by the grace of God, sought in Jesus the remedy for their woes and the foundation for their hopes. Their faith was weak and wavering; but wherever it existed, Jesus acted with the sovereign power of His own grace, and of the goodness of God that finds its measure in itself. However far unbelief may have gone in those who should profit by the grace of a dispensation, wherever there is a need to meet, Jesus answers to it when He is looked to. And this is a great mercy and encouragement for us.

Nevertheless, for this power to be exercised by man himself (to which God called him), it was needful that he should draw very near to God — that he to whom it was committed should accustom himself to communion with God, by withdrawing from all that connected him with the world and the flesh.

Let us here recapitulate the principles of this narrative with respect to their general application. The Lord, who was going away, to be seen no

more of the world until He came in glory, finds, on coming down from the mount of transfiguration, a case of the power of Satan over man, over the Jewish people. It had continued from almost the commencement of the child's existence. The faith that recognises the intervention of God in Christ, and takes shelter in it from present evil, is weak and wavering, pre-occupied with the evil, the sight of which conceals in great measure the power that masters and takes it away. Still the sense of need is deep enough to make it have recourse to that power.

It is the unbelief which knows not how to count on the power that is present, which puts an end to the relations of Christ with man. It is not man's misery that does so — it was this that brought Him down to earth. But the almighty power is present — it only needs faith to profit by it. But if the heart, on account of the enemy's power, turns to Jesus, it can (thank God) bring its unbelief to Him as well as all the rest. There is love and power in Him for every kind of weakness. The people crowd around, attracted by the sight of the enemy's power. Can the Lord heal him? But can he allow the testimony of Satan's power to invade their hearts? This is the curiosity of men whose imagination is filled with the effect of the enemy's presence. But, whatever might be the unbelief of man, Christ was present, the testimony of a power that, in love to men, destroyed the effects of the power of the enemy. The people gather round — Jesus sees it, and with a word casts out the enemy. He acts according to the necessity of His power, and the purposes of the love of God. Thus the effort of the enemy occasioned the intervention of Jesus, which the weakness of the father's faith tended to arrest. Nevertheless, if we lay all our infirmity, as well as our misery, before Christ, He answers according to the fullness of His power. On the other hand, if the flesh meddles with the thoughts of faith, it hinders intelligence in the ways of God. While journeying, Christ explained His death and His new condition in resurrection. Why blame the lack of intelligence which hid all this from them, and filled their minds with ideas of earthly and Messianic glory? The secret of their want of intelligence lay here. He had told them plainly; but on the way they disputed among themselves which should have the first place in the kingdom. The thoughts of the flesh filled their heart, in regard to Jesus, with exactly the opposite of that which engaged the mind of God respecting Him. Infirmity, presented to Jesus, finds an answer in power



and in sovereign grace; the flesh and its desires hide from us, even when thinking of Him, all the import of the thoughts of God. It was their own glory they were seeking in the kingdom; the cross — the true path to glory — was unintelligible to them.

After this the Lord resumes with His disciples the great subject before Him at this moment; and which was, in every way, that which now must be decided. He was to be rejected; and He separates Himself from the multitude, with His disciples, to instruct them on this point. Pre-occupied with His glory, with His rights as Messiah, they do not understand it. Their faith even, such as it was, blinds them to all beyond that; because, while rightly attaching itself to the Person of Christ, it connected — or rather, their own hearts, in which the faith existed, connected — with Christ the accomplishment of that which their flesh desired and sought in Him for themselves. How subtle is the heart! This betrays itself in their dispute for pre-eminence. Their faith is too weak to bear elucidations that contradicted their ideas (v. 32). These ideas are manifested without disguise among themselves. Jesus reproves them, and gives them a little child for an example, as He had so often done before. He that would follow Christ must have a spirit quite opposite to that of the world — a spirit belonging to that which was weak and despised by the pride of the world. In receiving such a one, they would receive Christ; in receiving Christ, they would receive the Father. It was eternal things that were in question, and the spirit of a man must then be the spirit of a child.

The world was so contrary to Christ, that he who was not against Him was for Him.\* The Son of man was to be rejected. Faith in His Person was the thing, not now individual service to Him. Alas! the disciples were still thinking of themselves: "He followeth not us." They must share His rejection; and if any one gave them a cup of cold water, God would remember it. Whatever would cause them to stumble in their walk, were it even their own right eye or hand, they would do well to cut off; for it was not the things of an earthly Messiah that were in question, but the things of eternity. And all should be tested by the perfect holiness of God, and that in judgment by one means or another. Every one should be salted with fire — the good and the bad. Where there was life, the fire would only consume the flesh; for when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. If the judgment reaches

the wicked (and assuredly it shall reach them), it is condemnation — a fire that is not quenched. But, for the good, there was also something else: they should be salted with salt. Those who were consecrated to God, whose life was an offering to Him, should not lack the power of holy grace, which binds the soul to God and inwardly preserves it from evil. Salt is not the gentleness that pleases (which grace produces without doubt), but that energy of God within us which connects everything in us with God, and dedicates the heart to Him, binding it to Him in the sense of obligation and of desire, rejecting all in oneself that is contrary to Him (obligation that flows from grace, but which acts all the more powerfully on that account). Thus, practically, it was distinctive grace, the energy of holiness, which separates from all evil; but by setting apart for God. Salt was good: here the effect produced in the soul, the condition of the soul, is so called, as well as the grace that produces this condition. Thus they who offered themselves to God were set apart for Him; they were the salt of the earth. But if the salt lose its savor, wherewith can it be salted? It is used for seasoning other things; but if the salt needs it for itself, there is nothing left that can salt it. So would it be with Christians; if they who were of Christ did not render this testimony, where should anything be found, apart from Christians, to render it to them and produce it in them?

[\* Some have difficulty in reconciling this with: "Forbid him not, he that is not with me is against me." But they coalesce when the main point is seen; Christ was a divine criterion of man's state, and brought things to an issue. The world was wholly, absolutely, against Him. If a man was not, there was no middle state, he was for Him. But things being brought to an issue, if a man was not for Him, he was of the world, and so against Him.]

Now this sense of obligation to God which separates from evil, this judgment of all evil in the heart, must be in oneself. It is not a question of judging others, but of placing oneself before God, thus becoming the salt, having it in oneself. With regard to others, one must seek peace; and real separation from all evil is that which enables us to walk in peace together. In a word, Christians were to keep themselves separate from evil and near to God in themselves; and to walk with God in peace among one another. No instruction could be more plain, more important, more valuable. It judges, it directs, the whole christian life in a few words.

But the end of the Lord's service drew near. Having described in these principles the exigencies of eternity and the character of christian life, He

brings back all the relations of God with man to their original elements, setting aside the world and its glory, and Jewish glory also, as to its immediate accomplishment, and pointing out the path of eternal life in the cross, and in the saving power of God. Nevertheless He takes the place of obedience Himself, and of service — the true place of man — in the midst of all this: God Himself being introduced on the other hand, in His proper character as God, in His nature and in His divine rights; the special glory that belongs to dispensations, and the relationships proper to them, being left out.

**CHAPTER 10.** It is a striking principle which meets us here — the relationships of nature (as God has Himself created them at the beginning) re-established in their original authority, while the heart is judged, and the cross the sole means of drawing nigh to the God who was their creative source. On earth Christ could offer nothing but the cross to those who followed Him. The glory to which the cross would lead has been shown to some of them; but as to Himself He took the place of servant. It was the knowledge of God by Him that should form them for this glory and lead them to it; for in fact that was life eternal. All other intermediate ways had, in the hands of men, become hostile to the God who had granted them, and therefore to His manifestation in the Person of Christ.

We find then (v. 1-12), the original relationship of man and wife as formed by the creative hand of God; in verses 13-16 the interest which Jesus took in young children, their place in the compassionate eye of God, the moral value of that which they represented before men. In verse 17 we come to the law, to the world, and to the heart of man in presence of the two. But at the same time we see that Jesus takes pleasure in that which is amiable in the creature as a creature — a principle of deep interest unfolded in this chapter — while still applying the touchstone morally to his heart. With respect to the law, as the natural heart can see it (that is, the outward action it requires), the young man had kept it; and with a natural sincerity, and uprightness, that Jesus could appreciate as a creature quality, and which we ought always to recognise where it exists. It is important to remember, that He who as man was perfectly separated unto God — and that, because He had the thoughts of God — could recognise the unchangeable obligations of the relationships established by God Himself; and also, whatever there was amiable and attractive in the creature of God

as such. Having the thoughts of God — being God manifest in the flesh, how could He but recognise that which was of God in His creature? And while doing this, He must establish the obligations of the relationships in which He has placed him, and exhibit the tenderness He felt for the infant representatives of the spirit which He prized. He must love the natural uprightness that may be developed in the creature. But He must judge the true condition of man fully brought out, and the affections that rested on objects raised up by Satan, and the will that rejected and turned away from the manifestation of God that called him to forsake these vanities and follow Him, thus putting his heart morally to the proof.

Jesus exhibits the absolute perfection of God in yet another manner. The young man saw the exterior of Christ's perfection, and, trusting to the power of man to perform that which is good, and seeing its practical fulfillment in Jesus, applies to Him — and, humanly speaking, with sincerity — to learn, from One in whom he saw so much perfection, though viewing Him merely as a Rabbi, the rule of eternal life. This thought is expressed in his sincere and cordial salutation. He runs, he kneels, to the Teacher who, morally, stood so high in his estimation, saying, "Good Master." The human limit of his ideas of this goodness, and his confidence in the powers of man, are manifested by the words, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" The Lord, taking up the whole import of his word, replies, "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God." What God has created he who knows God will respect, when it presents itself as such in its true place. But God alone is good. Man, if intelligent, will not make himself out good before God, nor dream of human goodness. This young man had at least the hope of becoming good by the law,\* and he believed that Jesus was so as a man. But the greatest advantages which the flesh could recognise, and which answered to its nature, did but the more effectually shut the door of life and heaven to man. The flesh used the law for self-righteousness, man being not good but a sinner. And, in fact, if we have to seek for righteousness, it is because we have it not (that is to say, because we are sinners and cannot attain this righteousness in ourselves). Moreover worldly advantages, which appeared to render man more capable of doing good, bound his heart to perishing things, and strengthened selfishness, and made him attach little value to the image of God.

[\* He does not ask, What must I do to be saved? He assumed that by the law he was to get life.]

But the instructions of this chapter carry on still farther the subject of man's condition before God. The ideas of the flesh accompany and give their form to the heart's affections, in one who is already quickened by the Spirit of grace acting through the attraction of Christ, until the Holy Ghost Himself communicates to those affections the strength of His presence, by giving them the glory of Christ in heaven for their object; and at the same time causing the light of that glory to shine (for the believer's heart) upon the cross, investing it with all the value of the redemption it accomplished, and of the divine grace that was its source, and producing conformity to Christ in every one that bears it with Him. Peter did not understand how any one could be saved, if such advantages as the Jews possessed in their relationship to God (and which were specially present in the case of this young man) only barred up the way to the kingdom of God. The Lord meets him upon this very ground; for man in the presence of God was now the question As far as man was concerned, it was impossible — a second profound truth — with respect to his condition. Not only was there none good excepting God, but no one could be saved, according to what man was. Whatever advantages he might have as means, they would avail him nothing in his state of sin. But the Lord introduces another source of hope — "with God all things are possible." The whole of this, indeed all this part of the Gospel, while it sets aside the Jewish system, does so, because, while that was founded on testing the possibility by the possession of divinely given ordinances of acquiring righteousness, and a standing before God as yet unrevealed, this revealed God and brought man and man's heart face to face, as a present thing, with Him; in grace, but still face to face as he was. The disciples, not having yet received the Holy Ghost, are still under the influence of the old system, and only see men as trees walking; and this is fully developed in this chapter. The kingdom indeed they could think of, but still with fleshly thoughts.

But the flesh, the carnal mind, enters yet farther into the career of the life of grace. Peter reminds the Lord that the disciples had forsaken all to follow Him. The Lord replies, that every one\* who had done so should have everything that would make him happy in his social affections, as God had formed him, and all this world could give as to the real enjoyment

of it and a hundredfold, together with the opposition that He Himself met with in this world; but in the world to come (Peter was not thinking of that) not some private individual advantage, but everlasting life. He went beyond the sphere of promise connected with the Messiah on earth, to enter, and to make others enter, into that which was eternal. As to individual reward, that could not be judged of according to appearances.

[\* This went beyond even the disciples' connection with the Jews, and in principle admitted the Gentiles.]

But further, they followed indeed Jesus, and thought of the reward, but thought little of the cross which led to it; they were amazed therefore at seeing Jesus deliberately going up to Jerusalem, where people sought to kill Him, and they were afraid. Although following Him, they were far from the height of realising all that the path implied. Jesus sedulously explains it to them — His rejection, and His entrance into the new world by resurrection. John and James, little affected by the Lord's communications, use their faith in the royalty of Christ to present the carnal desires of their heart, namely, to be on His right and left hand in the glory. Again the Lord assures them that they should participate in the cross with Him, and takes the place Himself of the accomplishment of His service and of bringing others into fellowship with His sufferings. As for the glory of the kingdom, it would be theirs for whom the Father had prepared it: the disposal of it was not in His hands save to them. This is the place of service, of humiliation, and of obedience, in which this Gospel always presents Him. Such should be the place of His disciples.

We have seen what the flesh was in an upright young man whom Jesus loved, and in His disciples who knew not how to take the true position of Christ. The contrast of this with the full triumph of the Holy Ghost is remarkable, as we find it in the comparison of this chapter with Philippians 3.

We have in Saul a man outwardly blameless, according to the law, like the young man in the gospel; but he has seen Christ in glory, and, by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, the righteousness according to which Christ entered into the glory in which He revealed Himself to Saul. All that had been gain to him was loss for Christ. Would he have a carnal righteousness, a human righteousness, even if he could have accomplished it, when he had

seen a righteousness bright with the glory of Christ? He possessed the righteousness which was of God by faith. What was that righteousness worth for which he had labored, now that he possessed the all-perfect righteousness which God gave by faith? Not sins alone were put away: human righteousness was made worthless by it. But his eyes had been opened to this by the Holy Ghost, and by seeing Christ. The things that engaged the heart of the young man and retained him in the world which Christ forsook, and which in Him had rejected God — could these things retain one who had seen Christ in the other world? They were but as dung to him. He had forsaken everything in order to possess this Christ. He considered them as utterly worthless. The Holy Ghost, in revealing Christ, had completely delivered him.

But this manifestation to the heart of Christ glorified goes yet farther. He who thus breaks with the world must follow the One whose glory he would reach; and this is to put himself under the cross. The disciples had forsaken all to follow Him. Grace had attached them to Christ that they might follow Him. The Holy Ghost had not yet linked them with His glory. He goes up to Jerusalem. They are amazed at it; and, in following Him (although He goes before them, and they have His guidance and His presence), they are afraid. Paul seeks to know the power of His resurrection: he desires to have fellowship with His sufferings, and to be conformed unto His death. Instead of amazement and fear, there is full spiritual intelligence and the desire of conformity to that death which the disciples feared; because he found Christ morally in it, and it was the pathway to the glory he had seen.

Moreover this sight of Christ purifies the desires of the heart with respect even to the glory. John and James desire for themselves the best place in the kingdom — a desire that availed itself (with a carnal and selfish object) of the intelligence of faith — a half-sighted intelligence that sought the kingdom at once, and not the glory and the world to come. Paul had seen Christ: his only desire in the glory was to possess Him — "that I may win Christ," and a new state conformed to it; not a good place near Him in the kingdom, but Himself. This is deliverance — the effect of the presence of the Holy Ghost revealing a glorified Christ.

We may remark, that in every case the Lord brings in the cross. It was the only passage from this world of nature, to the world of glory and of eternal life.\* To the young man He exhibits the cross; to the disciples that follow Him He exhibits the cross; to John and James, who sought a good place in the kingdom, He exhibits the cup they would have to drink in following Him. Eternal life, although received now, was, in possession and enjoyment according to God's purpose, on the other side of the cross.

[\* From the transfiguration until His rights as Son of David are in question, it is the cross that is presented. Prophet and preacher until then, that ministry ended with the transfiguration, in which His future glory shone in this world upon the cross that was to close His service here below. But before He reached the cross, He presented Himself as King. Matthew begins with the King, but Mark is essentially the Prophet.]

Observe also, that the Lord was so perfectly, divinely, above the sin in which nature lay, that He could recognise all that was of God in nature, and show at the same time the impossibility of any relation between God and man on the ground of what man is. Advantages were but hindrances. That which is death to the flesh must be gone through: we must have divine righteousness, and enter in spirit (hereafter in fact) into another world, in order to follow Him and to be with Him — to “win Christ.” Solemn lesson!

In result, God alone is good, and — sin having come in — it is impossible, if He be manifested, that man can be in relationship with God; but with Him all is possible. The cross is the only path to God. Christ leads to it, and we must follow Him in this path, which is that of eternal life. A child-like spirit enters into it by grace; the spirit of service and of self-renunciation walks in it. Christ walked in it, giving His life a ransom for many. This part of the Lord's instruction ends here. Lowliness of service is the place into which Christ brings us; in such He had walked. This chapter is worthy of all the attention which the Christian through grace can devote to it. It speaks of the ground man can stand upon, how far God owns what is natural, and the disciples' path down here.

At verse 46 another subject begins. The Lord enters on the path of His final relationship with Israel, presenting Himself as King, Emmanuel, rather than as the prophet who was to be sent. As the Prophet, His ministry had been accomplished. He had been sent (He told His disciples)



to preach. This had led Him to the cross, as we have seen. He must needs announce it as the result to those that followed Him. He now resumes His connection with Israel, but as the Son of David. He draws near to Jerusalem, from which He had departed and where He was to be rejected, and the power of God manifests itself in Him. By the way of Jericho, the city of the curse, enters the One who brings blessing at the price of the gift of Himself. The poor blind man\* (and such indeed was the nation of itself) acknowledges Jesus of Nazareth to be the Son of David. The grace of Jesus replies in power to the need of His people, that expressed itself by faith, and that persevered in, in spite of the obstacles put in its way by the multitude who did not feel this need, and who followed Jesus, attracted by the manifestation of His power, without being attached to Him by the faith of the heart. That faith has the sense of need. Jesus stands still and calls him, and before all the people manifests the divine power which responded in the midst of Israel to the faith that recognised in Jesus of Nazareth the true Son of David, the Messiah. The poor man's faith had healed him, and he followed Jesus in the way without dissimulation or fear. For the faith which then confessed Jesus to be the Christ was divine faith, although it might perhaps know nothing of the cross which He had just announced to His disciples as the result of His faithfulness and service, and in which faith must follow when genuine.

[\* I have already noticed that the blind man of Jericho is, in all the first three Gospels, the point where the history of the last dealings of Christ with the Jews and His final sufferings begin, His general ministry and service being closed.]

In that which follows (chap. 11) Jesus presents Himself to Jerusalem as King. His reception shows the extent to which the testimony He had rendered had acted on the hearts of the simple. God ordained therefore that it should take place. There is little difference between the narrative here and in Matthew. Only the kingdom is more simply presented as such: "The kingdom of our father David."

With what dignity, as the Judge of all things, Jesus now takes knowledge of all that was being done in the temple, and goes out without saying anything! The Lord had visited His temple, as also He had entered the city riding on the ass's colt, whereon never man sat. Israel is judged in the condemned fig-tree.\* The glory of the Lord, of the house of Jehovah, is

vindicated with authority — an authority which He claims, and which He exercises in His own Person. The scribes and chief priests draw back before the ascendancy that His word had given Him over the people, and He goes out of the city without being molested, notwithstanding their malice. The next day He assures His disciples, who were astonished at seeing the fig-tree withered away, that whatsoever they asked in faith should be accomplished; but that they must act in grace, if they would enjoy this privilege. The scribes and priests and elders are confounded, and demand His authority. He addresses their conscience, but in such a manner as to demonstrate their incompetency to ask Him such a question, exposing at the same time their insincerity. They could not decide with respect to the baptism of John: by what right then could they subject Him to their questions respecting His own claims? They could not decide when the case was before them. On the other hand, they must either sanction His work by their reply, or lose their authority with the people by denying the baptism of John who had born testimony to Christ. It was no longer a question of winning these men; but what an empty thing is the wisdom of man in the presence of God and His wisdom!

[\* That is man under the old covenant, flesh under divine requirement, and no fruit to grow on it for ever.]

The change of dispensation has a more definite place in Matthew, and the sin which rejected the King. In Mark, it is more the service of Christ as the Prophet. Afterwards, as we have seen, He presents Himself as King. And, in both Gospels, we see that it is Jehovah who fills the office which He has deigned to undertake.

Consequently we find in Matthew more personal accusations, as in the parable of the two sons (chap. 21:28-32), and the detail of the change of dispensation in the parable of the marriage feast (chap. 22:1-14); neither of which is in Mark. In our Gospel, the unchangeable dignity of His Person, and the simple fact that the Prophet and King were rejected (rejection that led to Israel's judgment) are set before us by the Spirit of God. Otherwise it is the same general testimony we have reviewed in Matthew.

The Lord afterwards gives the substance of the whole law, as the principle of blessing between the creature and God, and that which formed the touchstone for the heart in the rejection of Christ. I say for the heart,

because the trial was really there, although it was in the understanding that it appeared. Even when there were really orthodox principles (Christ being rejected), the heart that was not attached to His Person could not follow Him in the path to which His rejection led. The system of God's counsels which depended on that rejection was a difficulty. Those who were attached to His Person followed Him, and found themselves in it, without having well understood it beforehand. Thus the Lord gives the pith of the law — the whole law as essentially divine instruction — and the point at which the counsels of God are transplanted into the new scene, where they will be fulfilled apart from the wickedness or ill will of man. So that in these few verses (chap. 12:28-37) the law and the Son of David are presented, and the latter taking His place as Son of man — the Lord — at the right hand of God. This was the secret of all that was going on. The union of His body, the assembly, with Himself was all that remained behind. Only in Mark the Prophet recognises the moral condition, under the law, that tends towards entrance into the kingdom (v. 34). This scribe had the spirit of understanding.

The picture of the condition that would bring in judgment, which we find in Matthew 23, is not given here (see Synopsis about Matthew 23). It was not His subject. Jesus, still as the Prophet; warns His disciples morally; but the judgment of Israel, for rejecting the Son of David, is not here before His eyes in the same manner (that is to say, it is not the subject of which the Holy Ghost is here speaking). The real character of the scribes' devoutness is pointed out, and the disciples are warned against them. The Lord makes them feel also what it is that, in the eyes of God, gives true value to the offerings that were brought to the temple.

In **CHAPTER 13** the Lord takes up much more the service of the apostles in the circumstances that would surround them, than the development of the dispensations and the ways of God with respect to the kingdom — a point of view more presented in Matthew, who treats of this subject.

It will be observed, that the disciples' question takes only a general view of the subject which pre-occupied them. They ask when the judgment upon the temple and all these things shall be fulfilled. And from verses 9-13, although some circumstances found in Matthew 24 are included, the passage relates even more to that which is said in Matthew 10. It speaks

of the service which the disciples would accomplish in the midst of Israel, and in testimony against persecuting authorities, the gospel being preached in all nations before the end came. They were, as preachers, to fill the place which Jesus had occupied among the people, only that the testimony was to extend much farther. It would be in the face of all possible suffering and most trying persecutions.

But there would be a moment when this service should end. The well-known sign of the abomination that maketh desolate would point it out. They were then to flee. These would be the days of unparalleled distress, and of signs and wonders, which, if it were possible, would deceive the very elect. But they were forewarned. Everything should be shaken after that time, and the Son of man should come. Power should take the place of testimony, and the Son of man should gather together His elect (of Israel) from all parts of the earth.

It appears to me that in this Gospel, more than in any other, the Lord brings together the judgment on Jerusalem then at hand, and that which is yet to come, carrying the mind on to the latter, because He is here more occupied with the conduct of His disciples during those events. Israel, the whole system into which the Lord had come, was to be set aside provisionally, in order to bring in the assembly and the kingdom in its heavenly character, and afterwards the millennium — that is, the assembly in its glory and the kingdom established in power — when the legal system and Israel under the first covenant should be finally set aside. At these two periods the general position of the disciples would be the same; but the events of the latter period would be definitive and important, and the Lord speaks especially of them. Nevertheless that which was the most imminent, and which, for the present, set aside Israel and the testimony, required that a warning should be addressed to the disciples on account of their immediate danger; and they receive it accordingly.

The effort of the Jews to re-establish their system at the end, in despite of God, will but lead to open apostasy and definitive judgment. This will be the time of unequalled affliction, of which the Lord speaks. But from the time of the first destruction of Jerusalem by Titus until the coming of the Lord, the Jews are considered as set aside and under this judgment, in what degree soever it may have been accomplished.

The disciples are commanded to watch, for they know not the hour. It is the conduct of the disciples in this respect which is here especially before the eyes of the Lord. It is of this great day, and the hour of its arrival, that the angels and even the Son, as Prophet, know not. For Jesus must sit at the right hand of God until His enemies are made His footstool, and the time of His rising up is not revealed. The Father has kept it, says Jesus, in His own power. See Acts 3, where Peter proposes to the Jews the Lord's return. They rejected his testimony; and now they wait for the full accomplishment of all that has been spoken. Meantime the servants are left to serve during the Master's absence. He commanded the porter in particular to watch. They knew not at what hour the Master would come. This applies to the disciples in their connection with Israel, but at the same time it is a general principle. The Lord addresses it to all.

**CHAPTER 14** resumes the thread of the history, but with the solemn circumstances that belong to the close of the Lord's life.

The scribes and Pharisees were already consulting how they might take Him by craft and put Him to death. They feared the influence of the people, who admired the works and goodness and meekness of Jesus. Therefore they wished to avoid taking Him at the time of the feast, when the multitude flocked to Jerusalem: but God had other purposes. Jesus was to be our Paschal Lamb, blessed Lord! and He offers Himself as the victim of propitiation. Now the counsels of God and the love of Christ being such, Satan was not wanting in suitable agents to perform all that he could do against the Lord. Jesus offering Himself for it, the people would soon be induced to give up, even to the Gentiles, the One who had so much attracted them; and treachery would not be wanting to throw Him without difficulty into the hands of the priests. Still God's own arrangements, which owned Him and displayed Him in His grace, should have the first place; and the supper at Bethany and the supper at Jerusalem should precede — the one, the proposal, and the other, the act of Judas. For, let the wickedness of man be what it may, God always takes the place He chooses, and never allows the enemy power to hide His ways from faith, nor leaves His people without the testimony of His love.

This portion of the history is very remarkable. God brings forward the thoughts and fears of the leaders of the people, in order that we may know

them; but everything is absolutely in His own hands; and the malice of man, treachery, and the power of Satan when working in the most energetic manner (never had they been so active), only accomplish the purposes of God for the glory of Christ. Before the treachery of Judas He has the testimony of Mary's affection. God puts the seal of this affection upon Him who was to be betrayed. And, on the other hand, before being forsaken and delivered up, He can testify all His affection for His own, in the institution of the Lord's supper, and at His own last supper with them. What a beautiful testimony to the interest with which God cares for and comforts His children in the darkest moment of their distress!

Remark also, in what manner love to Christ finds, amid the darkness that gathers round His path, the light that directs its conduct, and directs it precisely to that which was suitable to the moment. Mary had no prophetic knowledge; but the imminent danger in which the Lord Christ was placed by the hatred of the Jews, stimulates her affection to perform an act which was to be made known wherever the death of Christ and His love for us should be proclaimed in the whole world. This is true intelligence — true guidance in things moral. Her act becomes an occasion of darkness to Judas; it is clothed with the light of divine intelligence by the Lord's own testimony. This love for Christ discerns that which is suitable — apprehends the good and the evil in a just and seasonable manner. It is a good thing to care for the poor. But at that moment the whole mind of God was centered on the sacrifice of Christ. They had always opportunity to relieve the poor, and it was right to do so. To put them in comparison with Jesus, at the moment of His sacrifice, was to put them out of their place, and to forget all that was precious to God. Judas, who cared only for money, seized the position according to his own interest. He saw, not the preciousness of Christ, but the desires of the scribes. His sagacity was of the enemy, as that of Mary was of God. Things advance: Judas arranges with them his plan to deliver up Jesus for money. The thing in fact is settled according to his thoughts and theirs. Nevertheless it is very remarkable to see here the way in which — if I may so speak — God Himself governs the position. Although it is the moment when the malice of man is at its height, and when the power of Satan is exerted to the utmost, yet all is accomplished exactly at the moment, in the manner, by the instruments, chosen of God. Nothing, not the least thing,

escapes Him. Nothing is accomplished but that which He wills, and as He wills, and when He wills. What consolation for us! and, in the circumstances which we are considering, what a striking testimony! The Holy Ghost has therefore reported the desire (easy to be understood) of the chief priests and scribes to avoid the occasion of the feast. Useless desire! This sacrifice was to be accomplished at that time; and it is accomplished.

But the time drew near for the last feast of the Passover that took place during the life of Jesus — the one in which He was Himself to be the Lamb, and leave no memorial to faith except that of Himself and of His work. He therefore sends His disciples to prepare all that was needed to keep the feast. In the evening He sits with His disciples, to converse with them, and to testify His love for them as their companion, for the last time. But it is to tell them (for He must suffer everything) that one of them should betray Him. The heart at least of each one of the eleven answered, full of grief at the thought.\* So should one have done who was eating from the same dish with Him; but woe to that man! Yet neither the thought of such iniquity, nor the sorrow of His own heart, could stop the outflowing of the love of Christ. He gives them pledges of this love in the Lord's supper. It was Himself, His sacrifice, and not a temporal deliverance, that they were henceforth to remember. All was now absorbed in Him, and in Him dying on the cross. Afterwards, in giving them the cup, He lays the foundation of the new covenant in His blood (in a figure), giving it to them as participation in His death — true draught of life. When they had all drunk of it, He announces to them that it is the seal of the new covenant — a thing well known to the Jews, according to Jeremiah; adding that it was shed for many. Death was to come in for the establishment of the new covenant, and for the ransom of many. For this, death was necessary, and the bonds of earthly association between Jesus and His disciples were dissolved. He would drink no more of the fruit of the vine (the token of that connection) until, in another way, He should renew this association with them in the kingdom of God. When the kingdom should be established, He would again be with them, and would renew these bonds of association (in another form, and in a more excellent way, no doubt, yet really). But now all was changing. They sing, and go out, repairing to the accustomed place in the Mount of Olives.

[\* There is something very beautiful and touching in this inquiry Their hearts were solemnized, and Jesus' words have all the weight of a divine testimony in their hearts. They had not a thought of betraying Him, save Judas; but His word was surely true, their souls owned it, and there was distrust of themselves in presence of Christ's words. No boasting certainty that they would not, but a bowing of heart before the solemn and terrible words of Jesus. Judas avoided the question, but afterwards, not to seem to be but as the rest, asks it, only to be personally marked out by the Lord, a sure relief to the rest (Matthew 26:25).]

The connection of Jesus with His disciples here below should indeed be broken, but it would not be by His forsaking them. He strengthened, or, at least, He manifested, the sentiments of His heart, and the strength (on His part) of these bonds, in His last supper with them. But they would be offended at His position, and would forsake Him. Nevertheless the hand of God was in all this. He would smite the Shepherd. But when once raised from the dead, Jesus would resume His relationship with His disciples — with the poor of the flock. He would go before them to the place where this relationship commenced, to Galilee, afar from the pride of the nation, and where the light had appeared among them according to the word of God.

Death was before Him. He must pass through it, in order that any relationship whatsoever between God and man might be established. The Shepherd should be smitten by the Lord of hosts. Death was the judgment of God: could man sustain it? There was but One who could. Peter, loving Christ too well to forsake Him in heart, enters so far into the path of death as to draw back again, thus giving a testimony all the more striking to his own inability to traverse the abyss that opened before his eyes in the Person of his disowned Master. After all, to Peter it was but the outside of what death is. The weakness that his fears occasioned made him unable to look into the abyss which sin has opened before our feet. At the moment when Jesus announces it Peter undertakes to face all that was coming. Sincere in his affection, he knew not what man was, laid bare before God, and in the presence of the power of the enemy who has death for his weapon. He had trembled already; but the sight of Jesus, which inspires affection, does not say that the flesh which prevents our glorifying Him is, in a practical sense, dead. Moreover he knew nothing of this truth. It is the death of Christ which has brought our condition out into full light, while ministering its only remedy — death, and life in resurrection. Like the ark



in Jordan, He went down into it alone, that His redeemed people might pass through dryshod. They had not passed this way before.

Jesus approaches the end of His trial — a trial which only brought out His perfection and His glory, and at the same time glorified God His Father, but a trial which spared Him nothing that would have had power to stop Him, if anything could have done so, and which went on even unto death, and unto the burden of wrath of God in that death, a burden beyond all our thoughts.

He approaches the conflict and the suffering, not with the lightness of Peter who plunged into it because he was ignorant of its nature, but with full knowledge; placing Himself in the presence of His Father, where all is weighed, and where the will of Him who laid this task upon Him is clearly stated in His communion with Him; so that Jesus accomplishes it, even as God Himself looked upon it, according to the extent and the intention of His thoughts and of His nature, and in perfect obedience to His will.

Jesus goes forward alone to pray. And, morally, He passes through the whole compass of His sufferings, realising all their bitterness, in communion with His Father. Having them before His own eyes, He brings them before His Father's heart, in order that, if it were possible, this cup might pass from Him. If not, it should at least be from His Father's hand that He received it. This was the piety on account of which He was heard and His prayers ascended up on high. He is there as a man — glad to have His disciples watch with Him, glad to isolate Himself and pour out His heart into the bosom of His Father, in the dependent condition of a man who prays. What a spectacle!

Peter, who would die for his Master, is not able even to watch with Him. The Lord meekly sets his inconsistency before him, acknowledging that his spirit indeed was full of goodwill, but that the flesh was worthless in conflict with the enemy and in spiritual trial.

The narrative of Mark, which passes so rapidly from one circumstance (that displays the whole moral condition of the men with whom Jesus was associated) to another, in such a manner as to place all these events in connection with each other, is as touching as the development of the details found in the other Gospels. A moral character is imprinted on every

step we take in the history, giving it as a whole an interest that nothing could surpass (excepting that which is above all things, above all thoughts) save that only One, the Person of Him who is here before us. He at least watched with His Father; for after all, dependent as He was by grace, what could man do for Him? Completely man as He was, He had to lean on One alone, and thus was the perfect man. Going away again to pray, He returns to find them again sleeping, and again presents the case to His Father, and then awakens His disciples, for the hour was come in which they could do no more for Him. Judas comes with his kiss. Jesus submits. Peter, who slept during the earnest prayer of his Master, awakes to strike when his Master yields Himself as a lamb to the slaughter. He smites one of the assistants, and cuts off his ear. Jesus reasons with those who were come to take Him, reminding them that, when He was constantly exposed, humanly speaking, to their power, they had laid no hands upon Him; but there was a very different reason for its now taking place — the counsels of God and the word of God must be fulfilled. It was the faithful accomplishment of the service committed to Him. All forsake Him and flee; for who beside Himself could follow this path to the end?

One young man indeed sought to go farther; but as soon as the officers of justice laid hold of him, seizing his linen garment, he fled and left it in their hands. Apart from the power of the Holy Ghost, the farther one ventures into the path in which the power of the world and of death is found, the greater the shame with which one escapes, if God permits escape. He fled from them naked.

The witnesses fail, not in malice, but in certainty of testimony, even as force could do nothing against Him until the moment God had appointed. The confession of Christ, His faithfulness in declaring the truth in the congregation, is the means of His condemnation. Man can do nothing, although he did everything as regards his will and his guilt. The testimony of His enemies, the affection of His disciples — everything fails: this is man. It is Jesus who bears witness to the truth; it is Jesus who watches with the Father — Jesus who yields Himself to those who were never able to take Him until the hour came that God had appointed. Poor Peter! He went farther than the young man in the garden; and we find him here, the flesh in the place of testimony, in the place where this testimony is to be rendered before the power of its opposer and of his instruments. Alas! he

will not escape. The word of Christ shall be true, if that of Peter be false — His heart faithful and full of love, if that of Peter (alas! like all ours) is unfaithful and cowardly. He confesses the truth, and Peter denies it. Nevertheless the grace of our blessed Lord does not fail him; and, touched by it, he hides his face and weeps.

The word of the prophet has now again to be fulfilled. He shall be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles. There He is accused of being a king, the confession of which must assuredly cause His death. But it was the truth.

The confession that Jesus had made before the priests relates, as we have seen in other cases in this Gospel, to His connection with Israel. His service was to preach in the congregation of Israel. He had indeed presented Himself as King, as Emmanuel. He now confesses that He is to Israel the hope of the people, and which hereafter He will be. “Art thou,” had the high priest said, “the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” That was the title, the glorious position, of Him who was the hope of Israel, according to Psalm 2. But He adds that which He shall be (that is to say, the character He would assume, being rejected by this people, that in which He would present Himself to the rebellious people); it should be that of Psalm 8, 110, and also Daniel 7, with its results — that is to say, the Son of man at the right hand of God, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Psalm 8 only presents Him in a general manner; it is Psalm 110 and Daniel 7 which speak of the Messiah in that particular manner, according to which Christ here announces Himself. The blasphemy which the high priest attributed to Him was only the rejection of His Person. For that which He said was written in the word.

Before Pilate (chap. 15), He only witnesses a good confession, a testimony to the truth where the glory of God required it, and where this testimony stood opposed to the power of the adversary. To all the rest He answers nothing. He lets them go on; and the evangelist enters into no details. To render this testimony was the last service and duty He had to perform. It is rendered. The Jews make choice of the seditious murderer Barabbas; and Pilate, hearkening to the voice of the multitude, won over by the chief priests, delivers Jesus to be crucified. The Lord submits to the insults of the soldiers, who mingle the pride and insolence of their class with the

hard-heartedness of the executioner whose function they performed. Sad specimens of our nature! The Christ who came to save them was, for the moment, under their power. He used His own power, not to save Himself, but to deliver others from that of the enemy. At length they lead Him away to Golgotha to crucify Him. There they offer Him a soporific mixture, which He refuses; and they crucify Him with two thieves, one on His right hand and the other on His left, thus accomplishing (for it was all they did or could do) everything that was written concerning the Lord. It was now the Jews' and the priests' hour; they had, alas for them! the desire of their heart. And they make manifest, without knowing it, the glory and perfection of Jesus. The temple could not rise again without being thus cast down; and, as instruments, they established the fact which He had then announced. Farther, He saved others and not Himself. These are the two parts of the perfection of the death of Christ with reference to man.

But, whatever might be the thoughts of Christ and His sufferings with regard to men (those dogs, those bulls of Bashan), the work which He had to accomplish contained depths far beyond those outward things. Darkness covered the earth — divine and sympathetic testimony of that which, with far deeper gloom, covered the soul of Jesus, forsaken of God for sin, but thus displaying incomparably more than at any other time, His absolute perfection; while the darkness marked, in an external sign, His entire separation from outward things, the whole work being between Him and God alone, according to the perfectness of both. All passed between Him and His God. Little understood by others, all is between Himself and God: and crying again with a loud voice, He gives up the ghost. His service was completed. What more had He to do in a world wherein He only lived to accomplish the will of God? All was finished, and He necessarily departs. I do not speak of physical necessity, for He still retained His strength; but, morally rejected by the world, there was no longer room in it for His mercy towards it: the will of God was by Himself entirely fulfilled. He had drunk in His soul the cup of death and of judgment for sin. There was nothing left Him but the act of dying; and He expires, obedient to the end, in order to commence in another world (whether for His soul separate from the body, or in glory) a life where evil could never enter, and where the new man will be perfectly happy in the presence of God.

His service was completed. His obedience had its term in death — His obedience, and therefore His life, as carried on in the midst of sinners. What would a life have meant in which there was no more obedience to be fulfilled? In dying now His obedience was perfected, and He dies. The way into the holiest is now opened — the veil is rent from top to bottom. The Gentile centurion confesses, in the death of Jesus, the Person of the Son of God. Until then, the Messiah and Judaism went together. In His death Judaism rejects Him, and He is the Savior of the world. The veil no longer conceals God. In this respect it was all Judaism could do. The manifestation of perfect grace is there for the Gentile, who acknowledged — because Jesus gave up His life with a cry that proved the existence of so much strength — that the Prince of life, the Son of God, was there. Pilate also is astonished that He is already dead. He only believes it when certified of its truth by the centurion. As to faith — far from grace, and even from human justice — he did not trouble himself at all on that point.

The death of Jesus did not tear Him from the hearts of those feeble ones who loved Him (who perhaps had not been in the conflict, but whom grace had now brought out from their retreat): those pious women who had followed Him and had often ministered to His wants, and Joseph, who, although touched in conscience, had not followed Him, until now, strengthened at the last by the testimony of the grace and perfection of Jesus (the integrity of the counsellor finding in the circumstances, not an occasion of fear, but that which induced him to declare himself) these women and Joseph are alike occupied about the body of Jesus. This tabernacle of the Son of God is not left without those services which were due from man to Him who had just quitted it. Moreover the providence of God, as well as His operation in their hearts, had prepared for all this. The body of Jesus is laid in the tomb, and they all wait for the end of the sabbath to perform their service to it. The women had taken knowledge of the place.

**CHAPTER 16.** The last chapter is divided into two parts — a fact that has even given rise to questions as to the authenticity of verses 9-20. The first part of the chapter, verses 1-8, relates the end of the history in connection with the re-establishment of that which has always been before us in this Gospel the relationship of the Prophet of Israel, and of the kingdom with the people (or at least with the remnant of the chosen people). The

disciples, and Peter, whom the Lord individually acknowledges in spite (yea, in grace, because) of his denial of his Master, were to go and meet Him in Galilee, as He said unto them. There the connection was re-established between Jesus in resurrection and the poor of the flock, who waited for Him (they alone being recognised as the people before God). The women say nothing to any others. The testimony of Christ risen was committed only to His disciples, to these despised Galileans. Fear was the means employed by the providence of God to prevent the women speaking of it, as they would naturally have done.

Verses 9-20. This is another testimony. The disciples do not appear here as an elect remnant, but in the unbelief natural to man. The message is sent to the whole world. Mary Magdalene, formerly possessed by seven demons — the absolute slave of that dreadful power — is employed to communicate the knowledge of His resurrection to the companions of Jesus. Afterwards Jesus Himself appears to them, and gives them their commission. He tells them to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. It is no longer specifically the gospel of the kingdom. Whosoever throughout the world believed and joined Christ by baptism should be saved: he who believed not should be condemned. It was a question of salvation or condemnation — the believer saved, he who refused the message condemned. Moreover, if any one was convinced of the truth but refused to unite with the disciples confessing the Lord, his case would be so much the worse. Therefore it is said, “he who believeth and is baptised.” Signs of power should accompany believers, and they should be preserved from that of the enemy.

The first sign should be their dominion over evil spirits, the second, the proof of that grace which went beyond the narrow limits of Israel, addressing itself to all the world. They should speak divers languages.

Besides this, with respect to the power of the enemy, manifested in doing harm, the venom of serpents and poisons should have no effect upon them, and diseases should yield to their authority.

In a word, it should be the overthrow of the power of the enemy over man, and the proclamation of grace unto all men.

Having thus given them their commission, Jesus ascends to heaven, and sits at the right hand of God — the place from which thus power shall come forth to bless, and from which He will return to put the poor of the flock in possession of the kingdom. Meanwhile, the disciples occupy His place, extending their sphere of service unto the ends of the earth; and the Lord confirms their word by the signs that follow them.

It may perhaps be thought that I have dwelt little on the sufferings of Christ in that which I have written on Mark. Never will this subject be exhausted; it is as vast as the Person and the work of Christ must be. Blessed be God for it! In Luke we have more details. And I follow the order of thought which the Gospel sets before me; and it appears to me that, with regard to the crucifixion of Christ, it is the accomplishment of His service that the evangelist has in view. His great subject was the Prophet. He must needs relate His history unto the end; and we possess in a brief narrative, a very complete picture of the events that mark the end of the Lord's life — of that which He had to fulfill as the servant of His Father. I have followed this order of the Gospel.

## LUKE

The Gospel of Luke sets the Lord before us in the character of Son of man, revealing God in delivering grace among men. Hence the present operation of grace and its effect are more referred to, and even the present time prophetically, not the substitution of other dispensations as in Matthew, but of saving heavenly grace. At first, no doubt (and just because He is to be revealed as man, and in grace to men), we find Him, in a prefatory part in which we have the most exquisite picture of the godly remnant, presented to Israel, to whom He had been promised, and in relationship with whom He came into this world; but afterwards this Gospel presents moral principles which apply to man, whosoever he may be, whilst yet manifesting Christ for the moment in the midst of that people. This power of God in grace is displayed in various ways in its application to the wants of men. After the transfiguration, which is recounted earlier in the narration by Luke\* than in the other Gospels, we find the judgment of those who rejected the Lord, and the heavenly character of the grace which, because it is grace, addresses itself to the nations, to sinners, without any particular reference to the Jews, overturning the legal principles according to which the latter pretended to be, and as to their external standing were originally called at Sinai to be, in connection with God. Unconditional promises to Abraham, etc., and prophetic confirmation of them, are another thing. They will be accomplished in grace, and were to be laid hold of by faith. After this, we find that which should happen to the Jews according to the righteous government of God; and, at the end, the account of the death and resurrection of the Lord, accomplishing the work of redemption. We must observe that Luke (who morally sets aside the Jewish system, and who introduces the Son of man as the man before God, presenting Him as the One who is filled with all the fullness of God dwelling in Him bodily, as the man before God, according to His own heart, and thus as Mediator between God and man, and center of a moral system much more vast than that of Messiah among the Jews) we must observe, I repeat, that Luke, who is occupied with these new relations (ancient, in fact, as to the counsels of God), gives us the facts belonging to the Lord's connection



with the Jews, owned in the pious remnant of that people, with much more development than the other evangelists, as well as the proofs of His mission to that people, in coming into the world — proofs which ought to have gained their attention, and fixed it upon the child who was born to them.

[\* That is, as to the contents of the Gospel. In the ninth chapter His last journey up to Jerusalem begins; and thence on to the latter part of the eighteenth, where (v. 31) His going up to that city is noticed, the evangelist gives mainly a series of moral instructions, and the ways of God in grace now coming in. In verse 35 of chapter 18 we have the blind man of Jericho already noticed as the commencement of His last visit to Jerusalem.]

In Luke, I add, that which especially characterises the narrative and gives its peculiar interest to this Gospel is, that it sets before us that which Christ is Himself. It is not His official glory, a relative position that He assumed; neither is it the revelation of His divine nature, in itself; nor His mission as the great Prophet. It is Himself, as He was, a man on the earth — the Person whom I should have met every day had I lived at that time in Judea, or in Galilee.

I would add a remark as to the style of Luke, which may facilitate the study of this Gospel to the reader. He often brings a mass of facts into one short general statement, and then expatiates at length on some isolated fact, where moral principles and grace are displayed.

Many had undertaken to give an account of that which was historically received among Christians, as related to them by the companions of Jesus; and Luke thought it well — having followed these things from the beginning, and thus obtained exact knowledge respecting them — to write methodically to Theophilus, in order that he might have the certainty of those things in which he had been instructed. It is thus that God has provided for the instruction of the whole church, in the doctrine contained in the picture of the Lord's life furnished by this man of God; who, personally moved by christian motives, was directed and inspired by the Holy Ghost for the good of all believers.\*

[\* The union of motive and inspiration, which infidels have endeavored to set in opposition to each other, is found in every page of the word. Moreover the two things are only incompatible to the narrow mind of those who are unacquainted with the ways of God. Cannot God impart motives, and through these motives engage a man to undertake some task, and then direct

him, perfectly and absolutely, in all that he does? Even if it were a human thought (which I do not at all believe), if God approved of it, could not He watch over its execution so that the result should be entirely according to His will?

At verse 5 the evangelist begins with the first revelations of the Spirit of God respecting these events, on which the condition of God's people and that of the world entirely depended; and in which God was to glorify Himself to all eternity.

But we immediately find ourselves in the atmosphere of Jewish circumstances. The Jewish ordinances of the Old Testament, and the thoughts and expectations connected with them, are the framework in which this great and solemn event is set. Herod, king of Judea, furnishes the date; and it is a priest, righteous and blameless, belonging to one of the twenty-four classes, whom we find on the first step of our way. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron; and these two upright persons walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord (Jehovah) without blame. All was right before God, according to His law in the Jewish sense. But they did not enjoy the blessing that every Jew desired; they had no child. Nevertheless, it was according, we may say, to the ordinary ways of God in the government of His people, to accomplish His blessing while manifesting the weakness of the instrument — a weakness that took away all hope according to human principles. Such had been the history of the Sarahs, the Rebeccas, the Hannahs, and many more, of whom the word tells us for our instruction in the ways of God.

This blessing was often prayed for by the pious priest; but until now the answer had been delayed. Now, however, when, at the moment of exercising his regular ministry, Zacharias drew near to burn incense, which, according to the law, was to go up as a sweet savor before God (type of the Lord's intercession), and while the people were praying outside the holy place, the angel of the Lord appears to the priest on the right side of the altar of incense. At the sight of this glorious personage Zacharias is troubled, but the angel encourages him by declaring himself to be the bearer of good news; announcing to him that his prayers, so long apparently addressed in vain to God, were granted. Elizabeth should bear a son, and the name by which he should be called was, "The favor of the Lord," a source of joy and gladness to Zacharias, and whose birth should be the

occasion of thanksgiving to many. But this was not merely as the son of Zacharias. The child was the Lord's gift, and should be great before Him; he should be a Nazarite, and filled with the Holy Ghost, from his mother's womb: and many of the children of Israel should he turn to the Lord their God. He should go before Him in the spirit of Elias, and with the same power to re-establish moral order in Israel, even in its sources, and to bring back the disobedient to the wisdom of the just — to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

The spirit of Elias was a steadfast and ardent zeal for the glory of Jehovah, and for the establishment, or re-establishment by repentance, of the relations between Israel and Jehovah. His heart clung to this link between the people and their God, according to the strength and glory of the link itself, but in the sense of their fallen condition, and according to the rights of God in connection with these relationships. The spirit of Elias — although indeed the grace of God towards His people had sent him — was in a certain sense a legal spirit. He asserted the rights of Jehovah in judgment. It was grace opening the door to repentance, but not the sovereign grace of salvation, though what prepared the way to it. It is in the moral force of his call to repentance that John is here compared to Elias, in bringing back Israel to Jehovah. And in fact Jesus was Jehovah.

But the faith of Zacharias in God and in His goodness did not come up to the height of his petition (alas! too common a case), and when it is granted at a moment that required the intervention of God to accomplish his desire, he is not able to walk in the steps of an Abraham or a Hannah, and he asks how this thing can now take place.

God, in His goodness, turns His servant's want of faith into an instructive chastisement for himself, and into a proof for the people that Zacharias had been visited from on high. He is dumb until the word of the Lord is fulfilled; and the signs which he makes to the people, who marvel at his staying so long in the sanctuary, explain to them the reason.

But the word of God is accomplished in blessing towards him; and Elizabeth, recognising the good hand of God upon her with a tact that belongs to her piety, goes into retirement. The grace which blessed her did not make her insensible to that which was a shame in Israel, and which, although removed, left its traces as to man in the superhuman

circumstances through which it was accomplished. There was a rightmindedness in this, which became a holy woman. But that which is rightly concealed from man has all its value before God, and Elizabeth is visited in her retreat by the mother of the Lord. But here the scene changes, to introduce the Lord Himself into this marvelous history which unfolds before our eyes.

God, who had prepared all beforehand, sends now to announce the Savior's birth to Mary. In the last place that man would have chosen for the purpose of God — a place whose name in the eyes of the world, sufficed to condemn those who came from thence — a maiden, unknown to all whom the world recognised, was betrothed to a poor carpenter. Her name was Mary. But everything was in confusion in Israel: the carpenter was of the house of David. The promises of God — who never forgets them, and never overlooks those who are their object — found here the sphere for their accomplishment. Here the power and the affections of God are directed, according to their divine energy. Whether Nazareth was small or great was of no importance, except to show that God does not expect from man, but man from God. Gabriel is sent to Nazareth, to a virgin who was betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David.

The gift of John to Zacharias was an answer to his prayers — God faithful in His goodness towards His people who wait upon Him.

But this is a visitation of sovereign grace. Mary, a chosen vessel for this purpose, had found grace in God's sight. She was favored\* by sovereign grace — blessed among women. She should conceive and bring forth a son: she should call Him Jesus. He should be great, and should be called the Son of the Highest. God should give Him the throne of His father David. He should reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and His kingdom should have no end.

[\* The expressions, "found favor" and "highly favored" have not at all the same meaning. Personally she had found favor, so that she was not to fear: but God had sovereignly bestowed on her this grace, this immense favor, of being the mother of the Lord. In this she was the object of God's sovereign favor.]

It will be observed here, that the subject which the Holy Ghost sets before us is the birth of the child, as He would be down here in this world, as brought forth by Mary — of Him who should be born.

The instruction given by the Holy Ghost on this point is divided into two parts: first, that which the child to be born should be; secondly, the manner of His conception, and the glory which would be its result. It is not simply the divine nature of Jesus that is presented, the Word which was God, the Word made flesh; but that which was born of Mary, and the way in which it should take place. We know well that it is the same precious and divine Savior of whom John speaks that is in question; but He is here presented to us under another aspect, which is of infinite interest to us; and we must consider Him as the Holy Ghost presents Him, as born of the virgin Mary in this world of tears.

To take first the verses 31-33.

It was a child really conceived in Mary's womb, who brought forth this child at the time which God had Himself appointed for human nature. The usual time elapsed before its birth. As yet this tells us nothing of the manner. It is the fact itself, which has an importance that can neither be measured nor exaggerated. He was really and truly man, born of a woman as we are — not as to the source nor as to the manner of His conception, of which we are not yet speaking, but as to the reality of His existence as man. He was really and truly a human being. But there were other things connected with the Person of the One who should be born that are also set before us. His name should be called Jesus, that is, Jehovah the Savior. He should be manifested in this character and with this power. He was so.

This is not connected here with the fact, "for he shall save his people from their sins," as in Matthew, where it was the manifestation to Israel of the power of Jehovah, of their God, in fulfillment of the promises made to that people. Here we see that He has a right to this name; but this divine title lies hidden under the form of a personal name; for it is the Son of man who is presented in this Gospel, whatever His divine power might be. Here we are told, "He" — the One who should be born — "should be great," and (born into this world) "should be called the Son of the Highest." He had been the Son of the Father before the world was; but this child, born on earth, should be called — such as He was down here — the Son of the Highest: a title to which He would thoroughly prove His right by His acts, and by all that manifested what He was. A precious thought to us and full of glory, a child born of a woman legitimately bears this name, "Son of the

Highest” — supremely glorious for One who is in the position of a man and really was such before God.

But other things still were connected with the One that should be born. God would give Him the throne of His father David. Here again we plainly see that He is considered as born, as man, in this world. The throne of His father David belongs to Him. God will give it Him. By right of birth He is heir to the promises, to the earthly promises which, as to the kingdom appertained to the family of David; but it should be according to the counsels and the power of God. He should reign over the house of Jacob — not only over Judah, and in the weakness of a transitory power and an ephemeral life, but throughout the ages; and of His kingdom there should be no end. As indeed Daniel had predicted, it should never be taken by another. It should never be transferred to another people. It should be established according to the counsels of God which are unchangeable, and His power which never fails. Until He delivered up the kingdom to God the Father, He should exercise a royalty that nothing could dispute; which He would deliver up (all things being fulfilled) to God, but the royal glory of which should never be tarnished in His hands.

Such should be the child born — truly, though miraculously born as man. To those who could understand His name it was Jehovah the Savior.

He should be King over the house of Jacob according to a power that should never decay and never fail, until blended with the eternal power of God as God.

The grand subject of the revelation is, that the child should be conceived and born; the remainder is the glory that should belong to Him, being born.

But it is the conception that Mary does not understand. God permits her to ask the angel how this should be. Her question was according to God. I do not think there was any want of faith here. Zacharias had constantly asked for a son — it was only a question of the goodness and the power of God to perform his request — and was brought by the positive declaration of God to a point at which he had only to trust in it. He did not trust to the promise of God. It was only the exercise of the extraordinary power of God in the natural order of things. Mary asks, with holy confidence, since God thus favored her, how the thing should be accomplished, outside the

natural order. Of its accomplishment she has no doubt (see verse 45; “Blessed,” said Elizabeth, “is she that believed.”) She inquires how it shall be accomplished, since it must be done outside the order of nature. The angel proceeds with his commission, making known to her the answer of God to this question also. In the purposes of God, this question gave occasion (by the answer it received) to the revelation of the miraculous conception.

The birth of Him who has walked upon this earth was the thing in question — His birth of the virgin Mary. He was God, He became man; but here it is the manner of His conception in becoming a man upon the earth. It is not what He was that is declared. It is He who was born, such as He was in the world, of whose miraculous conception we here read. The Holy Ghost should come upon her — should act in power upon this earthen vessel, without its own will or the will of any man. God is the source of the life of the child promised to Mary, as born in this world and by His power. He is born of Mary — of this woman chosen by God. The power of the Highest should overshadow her, and therefore that which should be born of her should be called the Son of God. Holy in His birth, conceived by the intervention of the power of God acting upon Mary (a power which was the divine source of His existence on the earth, as man), that which thus received its being from Mary, the fruit of her womb, should even in this sense have the title of Son of God. The holy thing which should be born of Mary should be called the Son of God. It is not here the doctrine of the eternal relationship of the Son with the Father. The Gospel of John, the Epistle to the Hebrews, that to the Colossians, establish this precious truth, and demonstrate its importance; but here it is that which was born by virtue of the miraculous conception, which on that ground is called the Son of God.

The angel announces to her the blessing bestowed on Elizabeth through the almighty power of God; and Mary bows to the will of her God — the submissive vessel of His purpose, and in her piety acknowledges a height and greatness in these purposes which only left to her, their passive instrument, her place of subjection to the will of God. This was her glory, through the favor of her God.

It was befitting that wonders should accompany, and bear a just testimony to, this marvelous intervention of God. The communication of the angel was not without fruit in the heart of Mary; and by her visit to Elizabeth, she goes to acknowledge the wonderful dealings of God. The piety of the virgin displays itself here in a touching manner. The marvelous intervention of God humbled her, instead of lifting her up. She saw God in that which had taken place, and not herself; on the contrary the greatness of these marvels brought God so near her as to hide her from herself. She yields herself to His holy will: but God has too large a place in her thoughts in this matter to leave any room for self-importance.

The visit of the mother of her Lord to Elizabeth was a natural thing to herself, for the Lord had visited the wife of Zacharias. The angel has made it known to her. She is concerned in these things of God, for God was near her heart by the grace that had visited her. Led by the Holy Ghost in heart and affection, the glory that belonged to Mary, in virtue of the grace of God who had elected her to be the mother of her Lord, is recognised by Elizabeth, speaking by the Holy Ghost. She also acknowledges the pious faith of Mary, and announces to her the fulfillment of the promise she had received (all that took place being a signal testimony given to Him who should be born in Israel and among men).

The heart of Mary is then poured out in thanksgiving. She owns God her Savior in the grace that has filled her with joy, and her own low estate — a figure of the condition of the remnant of Israel — and that gave occasion to the intervention of God's greatness, with a full testimony that all was of Himself. Whatever might be the piety suitable to the instrument whom He employed, and which was found indeed in Mary, it was in proportion as she hid herself that she was great; for then God was all, and it was through her that He intervened for the manifestation of His marvelous ways. She lost her place if she made anything of herself, but in truth she did not. The grace of God preserved her, in order that His glory might be fully displayed in this divine event. She recognises His grace, but she acknowledges that all is grace towards her.

It will be remarked here that, in the character and the application of the thoughts that fill her heart, all is Jewish. We may compare the song of Hannah, who prophetically celebrated this same intervention; and see also



verses 54, 55. But, observe, she goes back to the promises made to the fathers, not to Moses, and she embraces all Israel. It is the power of God, which works in the midst of weakness, when there is no resource, and all is contrary to it. Such is the moment that suits God, and, to the same end, instruments that are null, that God may be all.

It is remarkable that we are not told that Mary was full of the Holy Ghost. It appears to me that this is an honorable distinction for her. The Holy Ghost visited Elizabeth and Zacharias in an exceptional manner. But, although we cannot doubt that Mary was under the influence of the Spirit of God, it was a more inward effect, more connected with her own faith, with her piety, with the more habitual relations of her heart with God (that were formed by this faith and by this piety), and which consequently expressed itself more as her own sentiments. It is thankfulness for the grace and favor conferred on her the lowly one, and that in connection with the hopes and blessing of Israel. In all this there appears to me a very striking harmony in connection with the wondrous favor bestowed upon her. I repeat it, Mary is great inasmuch as she is nothing; but she is favored by God in a way that is unparalleled, and all generations shall call her blessed.

But her piety, and its expression in this song, being more personal, an answer to God rather than a revelation on His part, it is clearly limited to that which was necessarily for her the sphere of this piety — to Israel, to the hopes and promises given to Israel. It goes back, as we have seen, to the farthest point of God's relations with Israel — and they were in grace and promise, not law — but it does not go outside them.

Mary abides three months with the woman whom God had blessed, the mother of him who was to be the voice of God in the wilderness; and she returns to follow humbly her own path, that the purposes of God may be accomplished.

Nothing more beautiful of its kind than this picture of the intercourse between these pious women, unknown to the world, but the instruments of God's grace for the accomplishment of His purpose, glorious and infinite in their results. They hide themselves, moving in a scene into which nothing enters but piety and grace; but God is there, as little known to the world as were these poor women, yet preparing and accomplishing

that which the angels desire to fathom in its depths. This takes place in the hill country, where these pious relatives dwelt. They hid themselves; but their hearts, visited by God and touched by His grace, responded by their mutual piety to these wondrous visits from above; and the grace of God was truly reflected in the calmness of a heart that recognised His hand and His greatness, trusting in His goodness and submitting to His will. We are favored in being admitted into a scene, from which the world was excluded by its unbelief and alienation from God, and in which God thus acted.

But that which piety recognised in secret, through faith in the visitations of God, must at length be made public, and be fulfilled before the eyes of men. The son of Zacharias and Elizabeth is born, and Zacharias (who, obedient to the word of the angel, ceases to be dumb) announces the coming of the Branch of David, the horn of Israel's salvation, in the house of God's elect King, to accomplish all the promises made to the fathers, and all the prophecies by which God had proclaimed the future blessing of His people. The child whom God had given to Zacharias and Elizabeth should go before the face of Jehovah to prepare His ways; for the Son of David was Jehovah, who came according to the promises, and according to the word by which God had proclaimed the manifestation of His glory.

The visitation of Israel by Jehovah, celebrated by the mouth of Zacharias, embraces all the blessing of the millennium. This is connected with the presence of Jesus, who brings in His own Person all this blessing. All the promises are Yea and Amen in Him. All the prophecies encircle Him with the glory then to be realised, and make Him the source from which it springs. Abraham rejoiced to see the glorious day of Christ.

The Holy Ghost always does this, when His subject is the fulfillment of the promise in power. He goes on to the full effect which God will accomplish at the end. The difference here is, that it is no longer the announcement of joys in a distant future, when a Christ should be born, when a child should be brought forth, to bring in their joys in days still obscured by the distance at which they were seen. The Christ is now at the door, and it is the effect of His presence that is celebrated. We know that, having been rejected, and being now absent, the accomplishment of these things is necessarily put off until He returns; but His presence will

bring their fulfillment, and it is announced as being connected with that presence.

We may remark here, that this chapter confines itself within the strict limits of the promises made to Israel, that is to say, to the fathers. We have the priests, the Messiah, His forerunner, the promises made to Abraham, the covenant of promise, the oath of God. It is not the law; it is the hope of Israel — founded on the promise, the covenant, the oath of God, and confirmed by the prophets — which has its realisation in the birth of Jesus, of the Son of David. It is not, I again say, the law. It is Israel under blessing, not indeed yet accomplished, but Israel in the relationship of faith with God who would accomplish it. It is only God and Israel who are in question, and that which had taken place in grace between Him and His people alone.

In the next chapter (2) the scene changes. Instead of the relations of God with Israel according to grace, we see first the pagan emperor of the world — the head of Daniel's last empire — exercising his power in Emmanuel's land, and over the people of God, as though God did not know them. Nevertheless we are still in presence of the birth of the Son of David, of Emmanuel Himself; but He is outwardly under the power of the head of the beast, of a pagan empire. What a strange state of things is brought in by sin! Take special notice however that we have grace here: it is the intervention of God which makes all this manifest. Connected with it are some other circumstances which it is well to observe. When the interests and the glory of Jesus are in question, all this power — which governs without the fear of God, which reigns, seeking its own glory, in the place where Christ should reign — all the imperial glory is but an instrument in the hands of God for the fulfillment of His counsels. As to the public fact, we find the Roman emperor exercising despotic and pagan authority in the place where the throne of God should have been, if the sin of the people had not made it impossible.

The emperor will have all the world registered, and every one goes to his own city. The power of the world is set in motion, and that by an act which proves its supremacy over those who, as the people of God, should have been free from all but the immediate government of their God, which was their glory — an act which proves the complete degradation and

servitude of the people. They are slaves, in their bodies and in their possessions, to the heathen, because of their sins (see Nehemiah 9:36, 37). But this act only accomplishes the marvelous purpose of God, causing the Savior-king to be born in the village where, according to the testimony of God, that event was to take place. And, more than that, the divine Person, who was to excite the joy and the praises of heaven, is born among men, Himself a child in this world.

The state of things in Israel and in the world, is the supremacy of the Gentiles and the absence of the throne of God. The Son of man, the Savior, God manifested in the flesh, comes to take His place — a place which grace alone could find or take in a world that knew Him not.

This registration is so much the more remarkable, in that, as soon as the purpose of God was accomplished, it was carried no farther; that is to say, not till afterwards, under the government of Cyrenius.\*

[\* I have no doubt that the only right translation of this passage is, “The census itself was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.” The Holy Ghost notes this circumstance to show that, when once the purpose of God was accomplished, the decree was not historically carried out till afterwards. A great deal of learning has been spent on what I believe to be simple and clear in the text.]

The Son of God is born in this world, but He finds no place there. The world is at home, or at least by its resources it finds a place, in the inn; it becomes a kind of measure of man’s place in, and reception by, the world; the Son of God finds none, save in the manger. Is it for nothing that the Holy Ghost records this circumstance? No. There is no room for God, and that which is of God, in this world. So much the more perfect therefore is the love that brought Him down to earth. But He began in a manger and ended on the cross, and along the way had not where to lay His head. The Son of God — a child, partaking in all the weakness and all the circumstances of human life, thus manifested — appears in the world.\*

[\* That is to say, as an infant. He did not appear, like the first Adam, coming out, in His perfection, from the hand of God. He is born of a woman, the Son of man, which Adam was not.]

But if God comes into this world, and if a manger receives Him, in the nature He had taken in grace, the angels are occupied with the event on which depends the fate of the whole universe, and the accomplishment of

all the counsels of God; for He has chosen weak things to confound things that are mighty. This poor infant is the object of all the counsels of God, the upholder and heir of the whole creation, the Savior of all who shall inherit glory and eternal life.

Some poor men who were faithfully performing their toilsome labors, afar from the restless activity of an ambitious and sinful world, receive the first tidings of the Lord's presence on earth. The God of Israel did not seek for the great among His people, but had respect to the poor of the flock. Two things here present themselves. The angel who comes to the shepherds of Judea announces to them the fulfillment of the promises of God to Israel. The choir of angels celebrate in their heavenly chorus of praise all the real import of this wondrous event.

"Unto you," says the heavenly messenger who visits the poor shepherds, "is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." This was proclaiming good tidings to them and to all the people.\*

[\* "All the people" (not, as in the Authorised Version, "all people").]

But in the birth of the Son of man, God manifest in the flesh, the accomplishment of the incarnation had far deeper importance than this. The fact that this poor infant was there, disallowed and left (humanly speaking) to its fate by the world, was (as understood by the heavenly intelligences, the multitude of the heavenly host, whose praises resounded at the angel's message to the shepherds) "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good pleasure of God] in men." These few words embrace such widely extended thoughts, that it is difficult to speak suitably of them in a work like this; but some remarks are necessary. First, it is deeply blessed to see that the thought of Jesus excludes all that could oppress the heart in the scene which surrounded His presence on earth. Sin, alas! was there. It was manifested by the position in which this wondrous infant was found. But if sin had placed Him there, grace had placed Him there. Grace superabounds; and in thinking of Him, blessing, grace, the mind of God respecting sin, that which God is, as manifested by the presence of Christ, absorb the mind and possess the heart, and are the heart's true relief in a world like this. We see grace alone; and sin does but magnify the fullness, the sovereignty, the perfection of that grace. God, in His glorious dealings, blots out the sin with respect to which He acts, and which He

thus exhibits in all its deformity; but there is that which “much more aboundeth.” Jesus, come in grace, fills the heart. It is the same thing in all the details of christian life. It is the true source of moral power, of sanctification, and of joy.

We see next, that there are three things brought out by the presence of Jesus born as a child on the earth. First, glory to God in the highest. The love of God — His wisdom — His power (not in creating a universe out of nothing, but in rising above the evil, and turning the effect of all the enemy’s power into an occasion of showing that this power was only impotence and folly in presence of that which may be called “the weakness of God”) the fulfillment of His eternal counsels — the perfection of His ways where evil had come in — the manifestation of Himself amidst the evil in such a manner as to glorify Himself before the angels: in a word, God had so manifested Himself by the birth of Jesus, that the hosts of heaven, long familiar with His power, could raise their chorus, “Glory to God in the highest!” and every voice unites in sounding forth these praises. What love like this love? and God is love. What a purely divine thought, that God has become man! What supremacy of good over evil! What wisdom in drawing nigh to the heart of man and the heart of man back to Him! What fitness in addressing man! What maintenance of the holiness of God! What nearness to the heart of man, what participation in his wants, what experience of his condition! But beyond all, God above the evil in grace, and in that grace visiting this defiled world to make Himself known as He had never yet been known!

The second effect of the presence of Him who manifested God on the earth is, that peace should be there. Rejected — His name should be an occasion of strife; but the heavenly choir are occupied with the fact of His presence, and with the result, when fully produced of the consequences, wrapped up in the Person of Him who was there (looked at in their proper fruits), and they celebrate these consequences. Manifested evil should disappear; His holy rule should banish all enmity and violence. Jesus, mighty in love, should reign, and impart the character in which He had come to the whole scene that should surround Him in the world He came into, that it might be according to His heart who took delight therein (Proverbs 8:31).\* See, as regards a smaller scale, Psalm 85:10, 11.

[\* This quotation leads to a glorious apprehension, both of what was then doing, and of our blessing. The special interest of God is in the sons of men; wisdom (Christ is the wisdom of God) daily Jehovah's delight, rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth, before creation, so that it was counsel, and His delight in the sons of men. His incarnation is the full proof of this. In Matthew we have our Lord, when He takes His place with the remnant as this is, fully revealed, and it is in the Son's taking this place as man and being anointed of the Holy Ghost, that the whole Trinity is fully revealed. This is a wonderful unfolding of God's ways.]

The means of this — redemption, the destruction of Satan's power, the reconciliation of man by faith, and of all things in heaven and earth with God — are not here pointed out. Everything depended on the Person and presence of Him who was born. All was wrapped up in Him. The state of blessing was born in the birth of that child.

Presented to the responsibility of man, man is unable to profit by it, and all fails. His position thereby becomes only so much the worse.

But, grace and blessing being attached to the Person of Him just born, all their consequences necessarily flow forth. After all it was the intervention of God accomplishing the counsel of His love, the settled purpose of His good pleasure. And, Jesus once there, the consequences could not fail: whatever interruption there might be to their fulfillment, Jesus was their surety. He came into the world. He contained in His Person, He was the expression of, all these consequences. The presence of the Son of God in the midst of sinners said to all spiritual intelligence, "Peace on the earth."

The third thing was the good pleasure\* the affection of God — in men. Nothing more simple, since Jesus was a man He had not taken hold of angels.

[\* This is the same word as when it is said of Christ, "In whom I am well pleased." It is beautiful to see the unjealous celebration, by these holy beings, of the advancement of another race to this exalted place by the incarnation of the Word. It was God's glory, and that sufficed them. This is very beautiful.]

It was a glorious testimony that the affection, the good pleasure, of God was centered in this poor race, now far from Him, but in which He was pleased to accomplish all His glorious counsels. So in John 1 the life was the light of men.

In a word, it was the power of God present in grace in the Person of the Son of God taking part in the nature, and interesting Himself in the lot, of a being who had departed from Him, and making him the sphere of the accomplishment of all His counsels, and of the manifestation of His grace and His nature to all His creatures. What a position for man! for it is indeed in man that all this is accomplished. The whole universe was to learn in man, and in what God therein was for man, that which God was in Himself, and the fruit of all His glorious counsels, as well as its complete rest in His presence, according to His nature of love. All this was implied in the birth of that child of whom the world took no notice. Natural and marvelous subject of praise to the holy inhabitants of heaven, unto whom God had made it known! It was glory to God in the highest.

Faith was in exercise in those simple Israelites to whom the angel of the Lord was sent; and they rejoiced in the blessing fulfilled before their eyes, and which verified the grace that God had shown in announcing it to them. The word, “as it was told unto them,” adds its testimony of grace to all that we enjoy by the lovingkindness of God.

The child receives the name of Jesus on the day of His circumcision, according to Jewish custom (see chap. 1:59), but according to the counsels and revelations of God, communicated by the angels of His power. Moreover everything was performed according to the law; for historically we find ourselves still in connection with Israel. He who was born of a woman was born under the law.

The condition of poverty in which Jesus was born is also shown by the sacrifice offered for the purification of His mother.

But another point is here made prominent by the Holy Ghost, insignificant as He may apparently be who gave occasion to it.

Jesus is recognised by the godly remnant of Israel, so far as the Holy Ghost acts in them. He becomes a touchstone for every soul in Israel. The condition of the remnant taught by the Holy Ghost (that is, of those who had taken the position of the remnant) was this: They were sensible of the misery and ruin of Israel, but waited upon the God of Israel, trusting to His unchangeable faithfulness for the consolation of His people. They still said: How long? And God was with this remnant. He had made known to



those who thus trusted in His mercy the coming of the promised One, who was to be the fulfillment of this mercy to Israel.

Thus, in presence of the oppression of the Gentiles, and of the iniquity of a people who were ripening or rather ripened in evil, the remnant who trust in God do not lose that which, as we saw in the preceding chapter, belonged to Israel. In the midst of Israel's misery they had for their consolation that which promise and prophecy had declared for Israel's glory.

The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he should not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. That was the consolation, and it was great. It was contained in the Person of Jesus the Savior, without going farther into the details of the manner or the time of the accomplishment of Israel's deliverance.

Simeon loved Israel; he could depart in peace, since God had blessed Him according to the desires of faith. The joy of faith ever dwells on the Lord and on His people, but sees, in the relationship that exists between them, all the extent of that which gives rise to this joy. Salvation, the deliverance of God, was come in Christ. It was for the revelation of the Gentiles, till then hidden in the darkness of ignorance without a revelation; and for the glory of Israel, the people of God. This indeed is the fruit of the government of God in Christ, that is to say, the millennium. But if the Spirit revealed to this pious and faithful servant of the God of Israel the future which depended on the presence of the Son of God, He revealed to him that he held the Savior Himself in his arms; thus giving him present peace, and such a sense of the favor of God that death lost its terrors. It was not a knowledge of the work of Jesus acting on an enlightened and convicted conscience; but it was the fulfillment of the promises to Israel, the possession of the Savior, and the proof of the favor of God, so that the peace which flowed from thence filled his soul. There were the three things: the prophecy that announced the coming of Christ, the possession of Christ, and the effect of His presence in the whole world. We are here in connection with the remnant of Israel, and consequently find nothing of the church and of purely heavenly things. The rejection comes afterwards. Here it is all that belongs to the remnant, in the way of blessing, through the presence of Jesus. His work is not the present subject.

What a beautiful picture, and what a testimony rendered to this child, by the manner in which through the power of the Holy Ghost He filled the heart of this holy man at the close of his earthly life! Observe also what communications are made to this feeble remnant, unknown amid the darkness that covered the people. But the testimony of this holy man of God (and how sweet it is to think how many of these souls, full of grace and of communion with the Lord, have flourished in the shade, unknown to men, but well known to and beloved of God; souls who, when they appear, coming out of their retreat according to His will in testimony to Christ, bear so blessed a witness to a work of God which is carried on in spite of all that man is doing, and behind the painful and embittered scene that is unfolding on the earth!), Simeon's testimony here, was more than the expression of the deeply interesting thoughts which had filled his heart in communion between himself and God. This knowledge of Christ and of the thoughts of God respecting Him, which is developed in secret between God and the soul, gives understanding of the effect produced by the manifestation to the world of Him who is its object. The Spirit speaks of it by the mouth of Simeon. In his previous words we received the declaration of the sure fulfillment of God's counsels in the Messiah, the joy of his own heart. Now it is the effect of the presentation of Jesus, as the Messiah to Israel on the earth, which is described. Whatever may have been the power of God in Christ for blessing, He put the heart of man to the test. He should thus be, by revealing the thoughts of many hearts (for He was light), and so much the more that He was humbled in a world of pride, an occasion of falling to many, and the means of rising to many from their low and degraded condition. Mary herself, although the mother of the Messiah, should have her own soul pierced through by a sword; for her child should be rejected, the natural relationship of the Messiah to the people broken and disallowed. This contradiction of sinners against the Lord laid all hearts bare as to their desires, their hopes, and their ambition, whatever forms of piety might be assumed.

Such was the testimony rendered in Israel to the Messiah, according to the action of the Spirit of God upon the remnant, amid the bondage and misery of that people: the full accomplishment of the counsels of God towards Israel, and towards the world through Israel, for joy of heart to the faithful who had trusted in these promises, but for a test at that moment to every

heart by means of a Messiah who was a sign spoken against. The counsels of God and the heart of man were revealed in Him.

Malachi had said that those who feared the Lord in the evil days, when the proud were called happy, should often speak together. This time had arrived in Israel. From Malachi to the birth of Jesus, there was but the passage of Israel from misery to pride — a pride moreover that was dawning even in the days of the prophet. That which he said of the remnant was also being accomplished; they “spake together.” We see that they knew each other, in this lovely picture of God’s hidden people: “She spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Israel.” Anna, a holy widow, who departed not from the temple, and who deeply felt the misery of Israel, had besieged the throne of God with a widowed heart, for a people to whom God was no longer a husband, who were really widowed like herself, and she now makes known to all who pondered on these things together, that the Lord had visited His temple. They had looked for redemption in Jerusalem; and now the Redeemer — unknown of men — was there. What a subject of joy to this poor remnant! What an answer to their faith!

But Jerusalem was not after all the place in which God visited the remnant of His people, but the seat of pride of those who said “the temple of the Lord.” And Joseph and Mary, having performed all that which the law required, return with the child Jesus to take their place together with Him in the despised spot which should give Him its name, and in those regions where the despised remnant, the poor of the flock, had more their place, and where the testimony of God had announced that the light should appear.

There His early days were spent in the physical and mental growth of the true humanity which He had assumed. Simple and precious testimony! But He was not less conscious, when the time was come for speaking to men, of His real relationship to His Father. The two things are united in that which is said at the end of the chapter. In the development of His humanity is manifested the Son of God on earth. Joseph and Mary, who (while marvelling at all that happened to Him) did not thoroughly know by faith His glory, blame the child according to the position in which He formally stood towards them. But this gives occasion to the manifestation

of another character of perfection in Jesus. If He was the Son of God and had the full consciousness of it, He was also the obedient man, essentially and ever perfect and sinless — an obedient child, whatever sense He also had of another relationship unconnected in itself with subjection to human parents. Consciousness of the one did not injure His perfection in the other. His being the Son of God secured His perfection as a man and a child on the earth.

But there is another important thing to remark here; it is, that this position had nothing to do with His being anointed with the Holy Ghost. He fulfilled, no doubt, the public ministry which He afterwards entered on according to the power and the perfection of that anointing; but His relationship to His Father belonged to His Person itself. The bond existed between Him and His Father. He was fully conscious of it, whatever might be the means or the form of its public manifestation, and of the power of His ministry. He was all that a child ought to be; but it was the Son of God who was so. His relationship to His Father was as well known to Him, as His obedience to Joseph and to His mother was beautiful, becoming, and perfect.

Here we close this touching and divine history of the birth and early days of the divine Savior, the Son of man. It is impossible to have anything more profoundly interesting. Henceforward it is in His ministry, in His public life, that we shall find Him, rejected of men, but accomplishing the counsels and the work of God; separate from all, in order to do this in the power of the Holy Ghost, given to Him without measure, to fulfill that course with which nothing can be compared, with respect to which it would be lowering the truth to call it interesting. It is the center and the means, including His death, His offering Himself without spot to God — and the only possible means — of all relationship between our souls and God; the perfection of the manifestation of His grace, and the foundation of all relationship between any creature and Himself.

In **CHAPTER 3** we find the exercise of the ministry of the word towards Israel, and that for the introduction of the Lord into this world. It is not the promises to Israel and the privileges secured to them by God, nor the birth of that child who was heir to all the promises; the empire, itself a testimony to Israel's captivity, being an instrument for the

accomplishment of the word respecting the Lord. The years are here reckoned according to the reign of the Gentiles. Judea is a province in the hands of the Gentile empire, and the other parts of Canaan are divided under different chiefs, subordinate to the empire.

The Jewish system continues nevertheless; and the high priests were there to note the years of their subjection to the Gentiles by their names, and at the same time to preserve the order, the doctrine, and the ceremonies of the Jews, as far as could be done in their circumstances at that period.

Now the word of God is ever sure, and it is when the relationships of God with His people fail on the side of their faithfulness, that God in sovereignty maintains His relationship by means of communications through a prophet. His sovereign word maintains it when there are no other means.

But in this case Jehovah's message to His people had a peculiar character; for Israel was already ruined, having forsaken the Lord. The goodness of God had still left the people outwardly in their land; but the throne of the world was transferred to the Gentiles. Israel was now called to repent, to be forgiven, and to take a new place through the coming of the Messiah.

The testimony of God is therefore not in connection with His ordinances at Jerusalem, although the righteous submit to them. Nor does the prophet call them back to faithfulness on the ground on which they were. It is His voice in the wilderness, making His paths straight, in order that He may come, as from without, to those who repented and prepared themselves for His coming. Moreover, since it was the Jehovah Himself who came, His glory should not be confined within the narrow limits of Israel. All flesh should see the salvation wrought by God. The condition of the nation itself was that out of which God called them to come by repentance, proclaiming the wrath that was about to fall upon a rebellious people. Besides, if God came, He would have realities, the true fruits of righteousness, and not the mere name of a people. And He came in His sovereign power, which was able to raise up out of nothing that which He would have before Him. God comes. He would have righteousness as to man's responsibility, because He is righteous. He could raise up a seed unto Abraham by His divine power, and that from the very stones, if He

saw fit. It is the presence, the coming of God Himself, that here characterises everything.

Now, the axe was already at the root of the trees, and each was to be judged according to its fruits. It was in vain to plead that they were Jews; if they enjoyed that privilege, where were its fruits? But God did not accept any according to man's estimate of righteousness and privilege, nor the proud judgment the self-righteous might form of others. He addressed Himself to the conscience of all.

Accordingly the publicans, objects of hatred to the Jews, as instruments of the fiscal oppression of the Gentiles; and the soldiers, who executed the arbitrary mandates of the kings, imposed on the people by the Roman will, or that of heathen governors, were exhorted to act in accordance with that which the true fear of God would produce, in contrast with the iniquity habitually practiced in accordance with the will of man; the multitude were exhorted to practical charity, while the people, considered as a people, were treated as a generation of vipers, on whom the wrath of God was coming. Grace dealt with them in warning of judgment, but judgment was at the door.

Thus, from verses 3-14, we have these two things: in 3-6 the position of John towards the people as such, in the thought that God Himself would soon appear; in 6-14 his address to the conscience of individuals; verses 7, 8, 9 teaching them that the formal privileges of the people would afford no shelter in the presence of the holy and righteous God, and that to take refuge in national privilege was only to bring wrath upon themselves — for the nation was under judgment and exposed to the wrath of God. In verse 10 he comes to details. In verses 15-17 the question as to the Messiah is solved.

The great subject however of this passage — the great truth which the testimony of John displayed before the eyes of the people — was that God Himself was coming. Man was to repent. Privileges, granted meanwhile as means of blessing, could not be pleaded against the nature and the righteousness of Him who was coming, nor destroy the power by which He could create a people after His own heart. Nevertheless the door of repentance was open according to His faithfulness towards a people whom He loved.

But there was a special work for the Messiah according to the counsels, the wisdom, and the grace of God He baptised with the Holy Ghost and with fire. That is to say, He brought in the power and the judgment which dispelled evil, whether in holiness and blessing, or in destruction.

He baptises with the Holy Ghost. This is not merely a renewal of desires, but power, in grace, in the midst of evil.

He baptises with fire. This is judgment that consumes the evil.

This judgment is thus applied to Israel, His threshing-floor. He would gather His wheat in safety elsewhere; the chaff should be burnt up in judgment.

But at length John is put in prison by the regal head of the people. Not that this event took place historically at that moment; but the Spirit of God would set forth morally the end of his testimony, in order to commence the life of Jesus, the Son of man, but born the Son of God in this world.

It is with verse 21 that this history begins, and in a manner both wonderful and full of grace. God, by John the Baptist, had called His people to repentance; and those on whom His word produced its effect came to be baptised by John. It was the first sign of life and of obedience. Jesus, perfect in life and in obedience, come down in grace for the remnant of His people, goes thither, taking His place with them, and is baptised with the baptism of John as they were. Touching and marvelous testimony! He does not love at a distance, nor merely in bestowing pardon; He comes by grace into the very place where the sin of His people had brought them, according to the sense of that sin which the converting and quickening power of their God had wrought in them. He leads His people there by grace, but He accompanies them when they go. He takes His place with them in all the difficulties of the way, and goes with them to meet all the obstacles that present themselves; and truly, as identifying Himself with the poor remnant, those excellent of the earth, in whom was all His delight, calling Jehovah His Lord; and making Himself of no reputation, not saying that His goodness extended to God, not taking His eternal place with God, but the place of humiliation; and, for that very reason, of perfection in the position to which He had humbled Himself, but a perfection that

recognised the existence of sin, because in fact there was sin, and it behoved the remnant to be sensible of it in returning to God. To be sensible of it was the beginning of good. Hence He can go with them. But in Christ, however humble grace might be, His taking that path with them was grace that wrought in righteousness; for in Him it was love and obedience, and the path by which He glorified His Father. He went in by the door.

Jesus therefore, in taking this place of humiliation which the state of the beloved people required, and to which grace brought Him, found Himself in the place of the fulfillment of righteousness, and of all the good pleasure of the Father, of which He thus became the object, as in this place.

The Father could acknowledge Him, as the One who satisfied His heart in the place where sin and, at the same time, the objects of His grace, were found, that He might give free course to His grace. The cross was the full accomplishment of this. We shall say a word on the difference when speaking of the temptation of the Lord; but it is the same principle as to Christ's loving will and obedience. Christ was here with the remnant, instead of being substituted for them and put in their place to atone for sin; but the object of the Father's delight had, in grace, taken His place with the people, viewed as confessing their sins\* before God, and presenting themselves to God as concerned in them, while by this really morally out of them, and renewed in heart to confess them, without which the Lord could not have been with them, except as a witness to preach grace to them prophetically.

[\* He took it in and with the godly remnant, in the act which distinguished them from the unrepentant, but was the right place of the people, the first act of spiritual life. The remnant with John is the true Jew taking his true place with God. This Christ goes with them in.]

Jesus having taken this position, and praying — appearing as the godly man, dependent on God and lifting up His heart to God, thus also the expression of perfection in that position — heaven opens to Him. By baptism He took His place with the remnant; in praying — being there — He exhibited perfection in His own relationship with God. Dependence, and the heart going up to God, as the first thing and as the expression, so to say, of its existence, is the perfection of man here below; and, in this case, of man in such circumstances as these. Here then heaven can open.



And observe, it was not heaven opening to seek some one afar from God, nor grace opening the heart to a certain feeling; but it was the grace and perfection of Jesus which caused heaven to open. As it is said, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life.” Thus also it is the positive perfection of Jesus\* that is the reason of heaven’s opening. Remark also here that, when once this principle of reconciliation is brought in, heaven and earth are not so far from each other. It is true that, till after the death of Christ, this intimacy must be centered in the Person of Jesus and realised by Him alone, but that comprised all the rest. Proximity was established, although the grain of wheat had to remain alone, until it should “fall into the ground and die.” Nevertheless the angels, as we have seen, could say, “Peace on earth, the good pleasure of God] in men.” And we see the angels with the shepherds, and the heavenly host in the sight and hearing of earth praising God for that which had taken place; and here, heaven open upon man, and the Holy Ghost descending visibly upon Him.

[\* Remark here, Christ has no object in heaven to fix His attention on, as Stephen; He is the object of heaven. So He was to Stephen by the Holy Ghost, when heaven was open to the saint. His Person is always clearly evident, even when He puts His people in the same place with Himself or connects Himself with them. See on this Matthew.]

Let us examine the import of this last case. Christ has taken His place with the remnant in their weak and humble condition, but in it fulfilling righteousness. The entire favor of the Father rests upon Him, and the Holy Ghost comes down to seal and anoint Him with His presence and His power. Son of God, man on earth, heaven is open to Him, and all the affection of heaven is centered upon Him, and upon Him associated with His own.\* The first step which these humbled souls take in the path of grace and of life finds Jesus there with them, and, He being there, the favor and delight of the Father, and the presence of the Holy Ghost. And let us always remember that it is upon Him as man while Son of God.

[\* I do not speak here of the union of the church with Christ in heaven, but His taking His place with the remnant, who come to God through grace, led by the efficacy of His word, and by the power of the Spirit This is the reason I apprehend that we find all the people baptised, and then Jesus comes and is associated with them.]

Such is the position of man accepted before God. Jesus is its measure, its expression. It has these two things — the Father’s delight, and the power

and seal of the Holy Ghost; and that in this world, and known by him who enjoys it. There is now this difference, already noticed, that we look by the Holy Ghost into heaven where Jesus is, but we take His place down here.

Let us contemplate man thus in Christ — heaven open — the power of the Holy Ghost upon Him and in Him — the testimony of the Father, and the relationship of the Son with the Father.

It will be remarked that the genealogy of Christ is here traced, not to Abraham and David, that He should be the heir of the promises after the flesh, but to Adam; in order to exhibit the true Son of God a man on earth, where the first Adam lost his title, such as it was. The last Adam, the Son of God, was there, accepted of the Father, and preparing to take upon Himself the difficulties into which the sin and fall of the first Adam had brought those of his race who drew nigh to God under the influence of His grace.

The enemy was through sin in possession of the first Adam; and Jesus must gain the victory over Satan, if He would deliver those who are under his power. He must bind the strong man. To conquer him practically is the second part of the christian life. Joy in God, conflict with the enemy, make up the life of the redeemed, sealed with the Holy Ghost and walking by His power. In both these things the believer is with Jesus, and Jesus with him.

The unknown Son of God on earth, Jesus, is led (chap. 4) into the wilderness by the Holy Ghost, with whom He had been sealed, to undergo the temptation of the enemy, beneath which Adam fell. But Jesus endured this temptation in the circumstances in which we stand, not those in which Adam stood; that is to say, He felt it in all the difficulties of the life of faith, tempted in all points like as we are, sin excepted. Take notice here that it is no question of bondage to sin, but of conflict. When it is a question of bondage, it is a question of deliverance, not of conflict. It was in Canaan that Israel fought. They were delivered out of Egypt; they did not fight there.

In Luke the temptations are arranged according to their moral order: first, that which bodily need required; second, the world; third, spiritual

subtlety. In each the Lord maintains the position of obedience and of dependence, giving God and His communications to man — His word — their true place. Simple principle, which shelters us in every attack, but which, by its very simplicity, is perfection! Nevertheless let us remember that this is the case; for raising ourselves to marvelous heights is not the thing required of us, but the following that which applies to our human condition as the normal rule for its guidance. It is obedience, dependence — doing nothing except as God wills it, and reliance on Him. This walk supposes the word. But the word is the expression of the will, the goodness, and the authority of God, applicable to all the circumstances of man as he is. It shows that God interests Himself in all that regards him: why then should man act of himself without looking to God and to His word? Alas! speaking of men in general, they are self-willed. To submit and be dependent is precisely that which they will not. They have too much enmity to God to trust in Him. It was this, therefore, which distinguished the Lord. The power to work a miracle God could bestow on whom He would. But an obedient man, who had no will to do anything with respect to which the will of God was not expressed, a man who lived by the word, a man who lived in complete dependence upon God and had a perfect trust, which required no other proof of God's faithfulness than His word, no other means of certainty that He would intervene than His promise of so doing, and who waited for that intervention in the path of His will — here was something more than power. This was the perfection of man, in the place where man stood (not simply innocence, for innocence has no need of trusting God in the midst of difficulties, and sorrows, and questions raised by sin, and the knowledge of good and evil), and a perfection which sheltered one who possessed it from every attack Satan could make upon him; for what could he do to one who never went beyond the will of God, and to whom that will was the only motive for action? Moreover, the power of the Spirit of God was there. Accordingly we find that simple obedience directed by the word is the only weapon employed by Jesus. This obedience requires dependence on God, and trust in God, in order to accomplish it.

He lives by the word: this is dependence. He will not tempt (that is, put God to the test) to see if He is faithful: this is trust.

He acts when God wills, and because He wills, and does that which God wills. All the rest He leaves with God. This is obedience; and, remark, not obedience as submission to God's will where there was an adverse one, but where God's will was the one motive for action. We are sanctified to the obedience of Christ.

Satan is overcome and powerless before this last Adam, who acts according to the power of the Spirit, in the place where man is found, by the means which God has given to man, and in the circumstances in which Satan exercises his power. Sin there was none, or it would have been to yield, not to conquer. It was shut out by obedience. But Satan is overcome in the circumstances of temptation in which man is found. Bodily need, which would have become lust if self-will had entered into it, instead of dependence on the will of God; the world and all its glory, which, so far as it is the object of man's covetousness, is in fact the kingdom of Satan (and it was on that ground that Satan tried to bring Jesus, and showed himself to be Satan in so doing); and, lastly, self-exaltation in a religious way through the things which God has given us — these were the points of the enemy's attack. But there was no self-seeking in Jesus.

We have found, then, in these things which we have been looking at, a man filled with the Holy Ghost, and born of the Holy Ghost on earth, perfectly well-pleasing to God and the object of His affection, His beloved Son, in the position of dependence; and a man, the conqueror of Satan amid those temptations by which he usually gains advantage over man-conqueror in the power of the Holy Ghost, and by making use of the word, as dependent, obedient, and trusting in God in the ordinary circumstances of man. In the first position, Jesus stood with the remnant; in the second, alone — as in Gethsemane and on the cross. Nevertheless, it was for us; and, accepted as Jesus, we have in a certain sense the enemy to overcome. But it is a conquered enemy whom we resist in the strength of the Holy Ghost, who is given unto us in virtue of redemption. If we resist him, he flees; for he has met his conqueror. The flesh does not resist him. He finds Christ in us. Resistance in the flesh does not lead to victory.

Jesus conquered the strong man and then spoiled his goods; but it was in temptation, obedience, having no will but that of God, dependence, the use of the word, abiding in subjection to God, that Jesus gained the victory

over him. In all this the first Adam failed. After Christ's victory, we also as servants of Christ gain actual victories, or rather the fruits of the victory already gained in the presence of God.

The Lord has now taken His place, so to speak, for the work of the last Adam — the man in whom is the Spirit without measure, the Son of God in this world by His birth. He has taken it as the seed of the woman (nevertheless, conceived of the Holy Ghost); He has taken it as the Son of God perfectly well-pleasing to God in His Person as man here below; and He has taken it as the conqueror of Satan. Owned to be the Son of God, and sealed with the Holy Ghost by the Father, heaven being open to Him as man, His genealogy is, however, traced up to Adam; and, the descendant of Adam, without sin, full of the Holy Ghost, He conquers Satan (as the obedient man, having no motive but the will of God), and sets Himself to accomplish the work which God His Father committed to Him in this world, and that as man, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

He returns, in the power of the Spirit, into Galilee,\* and His fame spreads through all the region round about.

He presents Himself in this character: "The Spirit of Jehovah is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted,... to preach the acceptable year of Jehovah." Here He stops. That which follows in the prophet, respecting the deliverance of Israel by the judgment which avenges them of their enemies, is omitted by the Lord.

Now Jesus does not announce promises, but their fulfillment in grace by His own presence. The Spirit is upon this man, full of grace; and the God of grace in Him manifests His goodness. The time of deliverance is come; the vessel of His favor to Israel is there in their midst.

[\* And here note, as anointed with the Holy Ghost and led by Him He goes to be tempted, and returns in the power of it. None was lost, and this power was as much shown in the apparently negative result of overcoming, as in the miraculous manifestation of power afterwards on men.]

The examination of the prophecy renders this testimony so much the more remarkable, that the Spirit, having declared the sin of the people and their judgment, in the chapters that precede these words, speaks (when introducing the Christ, the Anointed) only of grace and blessing to Israel: if

there is vengeance, it should be executed upon their enemies for the deliverance of Israel.

But here it is grace in His Person, this man, the Son of God, full of the Holy Ghost, in order to proclaim the mercy of a God who is faithful to His promises, and to comfort and lift up the bruised and the poor in spirit. Blessing was there, presenting itself before them. They could not misunderstand it, but they do not recognise the Son of God. “Is not this Joseph’s son?” We have here the whole history of Christ — the perfect manifestation of grace in the midst of Israel, His land, and His people; and they knew Him not. No prophet is accepted in his own country.

But this rejection opened the way to a grace which went beyond the limits that a rebellious people would set to it. The woman of Sarepta, and Naaman, were testimonies of this grace.

Wrath fills the heart of those who reject grace. Unbelieving, and incapable of discerning the blessing that had visited them, they will not have it go elsewhere. The pride which rendered them unable to appreciate grace would not hear of its communication to others.

They seek to destroy Jesus, but He goes on His way. Here is the whole history of Jesus among the people traced beforehand.

He went His way; and the Spirit preserves to us the acts and the cures which characterise His ministry in the aspect of the efficacy of grace, and of its extension to others besides Israel.

Power was in Him whose grace was rejected. Acknowledged by devils, if not by Israel, He expels them by a word. He heals the sick. All the power of the enemy, all the sad outward effects of sin, disappear before Him. He heals, He withdraws; and when entreated to remain (the effect of His works that procured Him that honor from the people which He did not seek), He goes away to labor elsewhere in the testimony committed to Him. He seeks to accomplish His work, and not to be honored.

He preaches everywhere among the people. He casts out the enemy, He removes sufferings, and proclaims the goodness of God to the poor.

Man, He was come for men. He will associate others (chap. 5) with Himself in this glorious work. He has a right to do it. If He is in grace a

servant, He is so according to the full power of the Holy Ghost. He works a miracle well adapted to strike those whom He would call, and which made them feel that everything was at His disposal, that all depended on Him, that where man could do nothing He could do everything. Peter, stricken in conscience by the presence of the Lord, confesses his unworthiness, but drawn by grace goes to Christ. Grace raises him up, and appoints him to speak of itself to others — to fish for men. Already it was not a preacher of righteousness among the people of God, but one who drew into His net those that were afar off. He attracted to Himself as the manifestation on earth of the power and the character of God. It was grace which was there.

He was there with the will and the power to heal that which was a figure of sin, and incurable but by the intervention of God. But God had intervened; and in grace He can say, and says, to one who acknowledged His power but doubted His will, “I will, be thou clean.”\* Yet He submitted to Jewish ordinances as one obedient to the law. Jesus prayed, as a man dependent on God. This was His perfection as a man born under the law. Moreover, He must needs acknowledge the ordinances of God, not yet abrogated by His rejection. But this obedience as man became a testimony; for the power of Jehovah alone could heal leprosy, and He had healed it, and the priests were to acknowledge that which had been done.

[\* If a man touched a leper, he was unclean. But here grace works, and Jesus undefilable touches the leper (God in grace, undefilable, but a man touching the defiled thing to cleanse it).]

But He brings pardon as well as cleansing. He gives a proof of this by removing all infirmity, and imparting strength to one who had none. This was not the doctrine that God could pardon. They believed that. But God had intervened, and pardon was present. They would no longer have to wait for the last day, nor for a day of judgment, to know their condition. A Nathan would not be required to come and proclaim it on the part of a God who was in heaven while His people were on earth. Pardon was come, in the Person of the Son of man come down to earth. In all this, Jesus gave proofs of the power and the rights of Jehovah. In this instance it was the fulfillment of Psalm 103:3; but, at the same time, He gives these proofs as accomplished by the power of the Holy Ghost, without measure in man, in His own Person the true Son of God. The Son of man has power on

earth to forgive sins: in fact, Jehovah was come, a man on earth. The Son of man was there before their eyes, in grace, to exercise this power — a proof that God had visited them.

In both these instances\* the Lord, while displaying a power fitted to extend, and that was to extend, beyond this sphere, displays it in connection with Israel. The cleansing was a proof of the power of Jehovah in the midst of Israel, and the pardon was in connection with His government in Israel, and therefore proved itself by the perfect cure of the sick man, according to the psalm already quoted.\*\* No doubt, these rights were not limited to Israel, but at that moment they were exercised in connection with this nation. He cleansed, in grace, that which Jehovah alone could cleanse. He pardoned that which Jehovah alone could pardon, taking away all the consequence of their sin. It was, in this sense, a governmental pardon; the power of Jehovah present, fully to restore and re-establish Israel — wherever, at least, faith could profit by it. Afterwards, we shall find pardon for peace of soul.

[\* The call of Peter is more general in this respect, that it is connected with the Person of Christ. Nevertheless, although he was a fisher of men (a word used evidently in contrast with the fishes he was occupied with), he exercised his ministry more particularly with regard to Israel. But it was power in the Person of Christ that governed his heart; so that it was fundamentally, the new thing, but as yet in its connection with Israel, while extending beyond them. It is at the end of chapter 7 and in chapter 8 that we enter on ground beyond the narrow limits of Israel.]

[\*\* Compare Job 33, 36 and James 5:14, 15 — the first outside dispensations, and James under Christianity. In Israel, it is the Lord Himself in sovereign grace.]

The call of Levi, and that which follows, shows that not only was this power of grace to extend beyond Israel, but that the old vessel was not able to bear it. It must form a vessel for itself.

We may also remark here, on the other hand, that faith is characterised by perseverance. In the consciousness of the evil, an evil without remedy, and in the assurance that One able to heal is there, it does not allow itself to be discouraged — does not put off the relief of its need. Now, the power of God was there to meet this need.



This terminates that part of the narrative which reveals, in a positive way, divine power, visiting the earth in grace, in the Person of the Son of man, and exercised in Israel, in the condition in which it found them.

That which follows characterises its exercise in contrast with Judaism. But that which we have already examined is divided into two parts, having distinct characters which deserve to be noticed. First, from chapter 4:31-41, it is the power of the Lord manifesting itself on His part, as triumphing (without any particular connection with the mind of the individual) over all the power of the enemy, whether in sickness or in possession. The power of the enemy is there: Jesus casts it out, and heals those who are suffering from it. But, secondly, His occupation is to preach. And the kingdom was not only the manifestation of a power which casts out all that of the enemy, but of a power which brought souls also into connection with God. We see this in chapter 5:1-26. Here their condition before God, — sin, and faith, are in question — in a word, all that belonged to their relationship with God.

Here, consequently, we see the authority of the word of Christ upon the heart, the manifestation of His glory (He is owned as Lord), conviction of sin, just jealousy for His glory, in the sense of His holiness which should keep itself inviolate; the soul taking God's part against itself, because it loves holiness and respects the glory of God, even while feeling the attraction of His grace; so that, owing to this, everything is forgotten — fish, nets, boat, danger: "one thing" already possesses the soul. The Lord's answer then dispels all fear, and He associates the freed soul with Himself in the grace which He had exercised towards it, and in the work which He wrought in behalf of men. It was already delivered morally from all that was around it; now, in the full enjoyment of grace, it is set free by the power of grace, and wholly given to Jesus. The Lord — perfect manifestation of God — in creating new affections by this revelation of God, separates the heart from all that bound it to this world, to the order of the old man, in order to set it apart for Himself — for God. He surrounds Himself with all that is delivered, becoming its center; and, indeed, delivers by being so.

He then cleanses the leper, which none but Jehovah could do. Still He does not come out of His position under the law; and, however great His fame,

He maintains His place of perfect dependence as man before God. The leper, the unclean, may return to God.

He next forgives. The guilty one is no longer so before God; he is pardoned. At the same time he receives strength. Nevertheless it is still the Son of man who is there. In both cases faith seeks the Lord, bringing its need before Him.

The Lord now exhibits the character of this grace in connection with its objects. Being supreme, being of God, it acts in virtue of its rights. Human circumstances do not hinder it. It adapts itself by its very nature to human need, and not to human privileges. It is not subject to ordinances,\* and does not come in through them. The power of God by the Spirit was there, and acted for itself, and produced its own effects, setting aside that which was old — that to which man was attached,\*\* and to which the power of the Spirit could not be confined.

[\* Christ, born under the law, was subject to them; but that is a different thing. Here it is a divine power acting in grace.]

[\*\* But here also the Lord, in giving the reasons why the disciples did not follow the ordinances, and the institutions, of John and of the Pharisees, connects them with the two principles already pointed out — His position in the midst of Israel, and the power of grace which went beyond its limits. The Messiah, Jehovah Himself, was among them, in this grace (in spite of their failure under the law, in spite of their subjection to the Gentiles) according to which Jehovah named Himself “I am the Lord that healeth thee.” At least, He was there in the supremacy of grace for faith. Those therefore who owned Him as the Messiah, the husband of Israel, could they fast while He was with them? He would leave them: without doubt that would be their time to fast. Moreover, secondly, it is always impossible. He could not adapt the new cloth of Christianity to the old garment of Judaism, in its nature incapable of receiving its energy, or adapting itself to grace, worn out withal as a dispensation by sin, and under which Israel was, in judgment, made subject to the Gentiles. Besides, the power of the Spirit of God in grace could not be restricted to the ordinances of the law. It would destroy them by its very strength. The call of Levi violated, and most openly, all the prejudices of the Jews. Their own fellow-countrymen were the instruments of their masters’ extortion, and reminded them in the most painful manner of their subjection to the Gentiles. But the Lord was there in grace to seek sinners. That which the Holy Ghost sets before us is the presence of the Lord, and the rights which are necessarily attached to His Person and to His sovereign grace, which had come into Israel, but necessarily went beyond its limits (setting aside, consequently, the legal system which could not receive the new thing). This is the key to all these narratives. Thus, also, in that which follows respecting the sabbath, the

one case shows the supremacy which His glorious Person gave Him over that which was the sign of the covenant itself; and the other, that the goodness of God cannot abdicate its rights and its nature. He would do good even on a sabbath-day.]

The scribes and Pharisees would not have the Lord associate with the wicked and disreputable. God seeks those who need Him — sinners — in grace.

When they ask why His disciples do not observe the customs and the ordinances of John and the Pharisees, by which they guided the legal piety of their disciples, it is that the new thing could not be subjected to the forms that belonged to that which was old, and which could not sustain the strength and energy of that which came from God. The old were the forms of man after the flesh; the new, the energy of God, according to the Holy Ghost. Moreover it was not the time for a piety that took the form of self-mortification. What else could man do? But the Bridegroom was there.

Nevertheless, man would prefer that which was old, because it was man, and not the energy of God.

The circumstances related in chapter 6:1-10 have reference to the same truth, and in an important aspect. The sabbath was the sign of the covenant between Israel and God — rest after finished works. The Pharisees blame the disciples of Christ, because they rub out the ears of corn in their hands. Now a rejected David had overleapt the barrier of the law when his need required it. For when God's Anointed was rejected and cast out, everything became in a manner common. The Son of man (Son of David, rejected like the son of Jesse, the elect and anointed king) was Lord of the sabbath; God, who established this ordinance, was above the ordinances He had established, and present in grace the obligation of man yielded to the sovereignty of God; and the Son of man was there with the rights and the power of God. Marvellous fact! Moreover the power of God present in grace did not allow misery to exist, because it was the day of grace. But this was setting aside Judaism. That was the obligation of man to God, Christ was the manifestation of God in grace to men.\* Availing Himself of the rights of supreme goodness, and displaying a power that authorised His pretension to assert those rights, He heals, in a full synagogue, the man with the withered hand. They are filled with madness at this manifestation of power, which overflows and carries away

the dykes of their pride and self-righteousness. We may observe that all these circumstances are gathered together with an order and mutual connection that are perfect.\*\*

[\* This is an important point. A part in the rest of God is the distinctive privilege of saints — of God's people. Man had it not at the fall, still God's rest remained the special portion of His people. He did not get it under the law. But every distinct institution under the law is accompanied by an enforcement of the sabbath, the formal expression of the rest of the first Adam, and this Israel will enjoy at the end of this world's history. Till then, as the Lord said so blessedly, My Father worketh hitherto and I work. For us, the day of rest is not the seventh day, the end of this world's week; but the first day, the day after the sabbath, the beginning of a new week, a new creation, the day of Christ's resurrection, the commencement of a new state for man, for the accomplishment of which all creation round us waits, only we are before God in Spirit as Christ is. Hence the Sabbath, the seventh day, the rest of the first creation on human and legal ground, is always treated with rejection in the New Testament, though not set aside till judgment came, but as an ordinance it died with Christ in the grave, where He passed it — only it was made for man as a mercy. The Lord's day is our day, and precious external earnest of the heavenly rest.]

[\*\* I may remark here that, where chronological order is followed in Luke, it is the same as in Mark and that of the events, not as in Matthew put together to bring out the object of the Gospel; only he occasionally introduces a circumstance which may have happened at another time illustrative of the subject historically related. But in chapter 9 Luke arrives at the last journey up to Jerusalem (v. 51), and, from this on, a series of moral instruction follows to chapter 18:31, chiefly, if not all, during the period of this journey, but which for the most part has little to say to dates.]

The Lord had shown that this grace — which had visited Israel according to all that could be expected from the Lord Almighty, faithful to His promises — could, nevertheless, not be confined to the narrow limits of that people, nor be adapted to the ordinances of the law; that men desired the old things, but that the power of God acted according to its own nature. He had shown that the most sacred, the most obligatory, sign of the old covenant, must bow to His title superior to all ordinance, and give place to the rights of His divine love which was in action. But the old thing was thus judged, and passing away. He had shown Himself in everything — in the calling of Peter especially — to be the new center, around which all that sought God and blessing must gather; for He was the living manifestation of God and of blessing in men. Thus God was manifested, the old order of things was worn out and unable to contain this grace, and the remnant were separated — around the Lord — from a world that saw

no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. He now acted on this basis; and if faith sought Him in Israel, this power of grace manifested God in a new way. God surrounds Himself with men, as the center of blessing in Christ as man. But He is love, and in the activity of that love He seeks the lost. None but one, and one who was God and revealed Him, could surround Himself with His followers. No prophet ever did (see John 1). None could send out with the authority and power of a divine message but God. Christ had been sent; He now sends. The name of “apostle” (sent), for He so names them, contains this deep and marvelous truth — God is acting in grace. He surrounds Himself with blessed ones. He seeks miserable sinners. If Christ, the we center of grace and happiness, surrounds Himself with followers, yet He sends also His chosen ones to bear testimony of the love which He came to manifest. God has manifested Himself in man. In man He seeks sinners. Man has part in the most immediate display of the divine nature in both ways. He is with Christ as man; and he is sent by Christ. Christ Himself does this as man. It is man full of the Holy Ghost. Thus we see Him again manifested in dependence on His Father before choosing the apostles; He retired to pray, He passes the night in prayer.

And now He goes beyond the manifestation of Himself, as personally full of the Holy Ghost to bring in the knowledge of God among men. He becomes the center, around which all must come who sought God, and a source of mission for the accomplishment of His love — the center of the manifestation of divine power in grace. And, therefore, He called around Him the remnant who should be saved. His position, in every respect, is summed up in that which is said after He came down from the mountain. He comes down with the apostles from His communion with God. In the plain\* He is surrounded by the company of His disciples, and then by a great multitude, drawn together by His word and works. There was the attraction of the word of God, and He healed the diseases of men, and cast out the power of Satan. This power dwelt in His Person; the virtue that went out of Him gave these outward testimonies to the power of God present in grace. The attention of the people was drawn to Him by these means. Nevertheless we have seen that the old things, to which the multitude were attached, were passing away He surrounded Himself with hearts faithful to God, the called of His grace. Here therefore He does not,

as in Matthew, announce strictly the character of the kingdom, to show that of the dispensation which was at hand, saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, etc.; but, distinguishing the remnant, by their attachment to Himself, He declares to the disciples who followed Him that they were these blessed ones. They were poor and despised, but they were blessed. They should have the kingdom. This is important, because it separates the remnant, and puts them in relationship with Himself to receive the blessing. He describes, in a remarkable manner, the character of those who were thus blessed of God.

[\* Properly ‘a level place’ on the mountain.]

The Lord’s discourse is divided into several branches.

Verses 20-26 The contrast between the remnant, manifested as His disciples, and the multitude who were satisfied with the world, adding a warning to those who stood in the place of disciples, and in that gained the favor of the world. Woe be to such! Remark also here, that it is not a question of persecution for righteousness’ sake, as in Matthew, but only for His name’s sake. All was marked by attachment to His Person.

Verses 27-36. The character of God their Father in the manifestation of grace in Christ, which they were to imitate. He reveals, note, the Father’s name and puts them in the place of children.

Verses 37, 38. This character particularly developed in the position of Christ, as He was on earth at that time, Christ fulfilling His service on earth. This implied government and recompense on God’s part, as was the case with regard to Christ Himself.

Verse 39. The condition of the leaders in Israel, and the connection between them and the multitude.

Verse 40. That of the disciples in relation to Christ.

Verses 41, 42. The way to attain it, and to see clearly in the midst of evil, is to put evil away from oneself.

Afterwards, in general, its own fruit characterised every tree. Coming around Christ to hear Him was not the question, but that He should be so

precious to their hearts that they would put aside every obstacle and practically obey Him.

Let us sum up these things which we have been considering. He acts in a power which dispels evil, because He finds it there, and He is good; and God alone is good. He reaches the conscience, and calls souls to Himself. He acts in connection with the hope of Israel and the power of God to cleanse, pardon and give them strength. But it is a grace which we all need; and the goodness of God, the energy of His love, did not confine itself to that people. Its exercise did not agree with the forms on which the Jews lived (or, rather, could not live); and the new wine must be put into new bottles. The question of the sabbath settled the question of the introduction of this power; the sign of the covenant gave way to it: He who exercised it was Lord of the sabbath. The lovingkindness of the God of the sabbath was not stayed, as if having His hands tied by that which He had established in connection with the covenant. Jesus then assembles the vessels of His grace and power, according to the will of God, around Himself. They were the blessed ones, the heirs of the kingdom. The Lord describes their character. It was not the indifference and pride that arose from ignorance of God, justly alienated from Israel, who had sinned against Him, and despised the glorious manifestation of His grace in Christ. They share the distress and pain which such a condition of God's people must cause in those who had the mind of God. Hated, proscribed, put to shame for the sake of the Son of man, who had come to bear their sorrows, it was their glory. They should share His glory when the nature of God was glorified in doing all things according to His own will. They would not be put to shame in heaven; they should have their reward there, not in Israel. "In like manner had their fathers done unto the prophets." Woe unto those that were at ease in Zion, during the sinful condition of Israel, and their rejection and ill-treatment of their Messiah! It is the contrast between the character of the true remnant and that of the proud among the people.

We then find the conduct that is suitable to the former conduct which, to express it in one word, comprises in its essential elements, the character of God in grace, as manifested in Jesus on the earth. But Jesus had His own character of service as the Son of man; the application of this to their particular circumstances is added in verses 37, 38. In 39 the leaders of Israel are set before us, and in verse 40 the portion of the disciples.

Rejected like Himself, they should have His portion; but, assuming that they followed Him perfectly, they should have it in blessing, in grace, in character, in position also. What a favor!\* Moreover, the judgment of self, and not of one's brother, was the means of attaining clear moral sight. The tree good, the fruit would be good. Self-judgment applies to the trees. This is always true. In self-judgment, it is not only the fruit that is corrected; it is oneself. And the tree is known by its fruit — not only by good fruit, but by its own. The Christian bears the fruit of the nature of Christ. Also it is the heart itself, and real practical obedience, that are in question.

[\* This however does not speak of nature intrinsically, for in Christ was no sin. Nor has the word used for "perfect" that sense. It is one completely thoroughly instructed, formed completely by the teaching of his master He will be like him, as his master, in all in which he was formed by him. Christ was the perfection; we grow up unto Him in all things unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (see Colossians 1:28).]

Here then the great principles of the new life, in its full practical development in Christ, are set before us. It is the new thing morally, the savor and character of the new wine — the remnant made like unto Christ whom they followed, unto Christ the new center of the movement of the Spirit of God, and of the calling of His grace. Christ has come out of the walled court of Judaism, in the power of a new life and by the authority of the Most High, who had brought blessing into this enclosure, which it was unable to acknowledge. He had come out from it, according to the principles of the life itself which He announced; historically, He was still in it.

Hence, after this, we find the Spirit acting in the heart of a Gentile (chap. 7). That heart manifested more faith than any among the children of Israel. Humble in heart, and loving the people of God, as such, for the sake of God, whose people they were, and thus raised in his affections above their practical wretched state, he can see in Jesus One who had authority over everything, even as he himself had over his soldiers and servants. He knew nothing of the Messiah, but he recognised in Jesus\* the power of God. This was not mere idea; it was faith. There was no such faith in Israel.

[\* We have seen this to be precisely the subject of the Holy Ghost in our Gospel.]



The Lord then acts with a power which was to be the source of that which is new for man. He raises the dead. This was indeed going beyond the pale of the ordinances of the law. He has compassion on the affliction and misery of man. Death was a burden to him: Jesus delivers him from it. It was not only cleansing a leprous Israelite, nor pardoning and healing believers among His people; He restores life to one who had lost it. Israel, no doubt, will profit by it; but the power necessary to the accomplishment of this work is that which makes all things new wherever it may be.

The change of which we speak, and which these two examples so strikingly illustrate, is brought out in treating of the connection between Christ and John the Baptist, who sends to learn from the Lord's own mouth who He is. John had heard of His miracles, and sends his disciples to learn who it was that wrought them. Naturally the Messiah, in the exercise of His power, would have delivered him from prison. Was He the Messiah? or was John to wait for another? He had faith enough to depend on the answer of One who wrought these miracles; but, shut up in prison, his mind desired something more positive. This circumstance, brought about by God, gives rise to an explanation respecting the relative position of John and Jesus. The Lord does not here receive testimony from John. John was to receive Christ upon the testimony He gave of Himself; and that as having taken a position which would offend those who judged according to Jewish and carnal ideas — a position which required faith in a divine testimony, and, consequently, surrounded itself with those whom a moral change had enabled to appreciate this testimony. The Lord, in reply to John's messengers, works miracles which prove the power of God present in grace and service rendered to the poor; and declares that blessed is he who is not offended at the humble position He had taken in order to accomplish it. But He gives testimony to John, if He will receive none from him. He had attracted the attention of the people, and with reason; he was more than a prophet — he had prepared the way of the Lord Himself. Nevertheless, if he prepared the way, the immense and complete change to be made was not itself accomplished. John's ministry, by its very nature, put him outside the effect of this change. He went before it to announce the One who would accomplish it, whose presence would bring in its power on the earth. The least therefore in the kingdom was greater than he.

The people, who had received with humility the word sent by John the Baptist, bore testimony in their heart to the ways and the wisdom of God. Those who trusted in themselves rejected the counsels of God accomplished in Christ. The Lord, on this, declares plainly what their condition is. They rejected alike the warnings and the grace of God. The children of wisdom (those in whom the wisdom of God wrought) acknowledged and gave glory to it in its ways. This is the history of the reception both of John and of Jesus. The wisdom of man denounced the ways of God. The righteous severity of His testimony against evil, against the condition of His people, showed to man's eyes the influence of a devil. The perfection of His grace, condescending to poor sinners, and presenting itself to them where they were, was the wallowing in sin and the making oneself known by one's associates. Proud self-righteousness could bear neither. The wisdom of God would be owned by those who were taught by it, and by those alone.

Thereupon these ways of God towards the most wretched sinners, and their effect, in contrast with this pharisaic spirit, are shown, in the history of the woman who was a sinner in the Pharisee's house; and a pardon is revealed, not with reference to the government of God in the earth on behalf of His people (a government with which the healing of an Israelite under God's discipline was connected), but an absolute pardon, involving peace to the soul, is granted to the most miserable of sinners. It was not here merely the question of a prophet. The Pharisee's self-righteousness could not discern even that.

We have a soul that loves God, and much, because God is love — a soul that has learnt this with regard to, and by means of, its own sins, though not yet knowing forgiveness, in seeing Jesus. This is grace. Nothing more touching than the way in which the Lord shows the presence of those qualities which made this woman now truly excellent — qualities connected with the discernment of His Person by faith. In her were found divine understanding of the Person of Christ, not reasoned out indeed in doctrine but felt in its effect in her heart, deep sense of her own sin, humility, love for that which was good, devotedness to Him who was good. Everything showed a heart in which reigned sentiments proper to relationship with God — sentiments that flowed from His presence revealed in the heart, because He had made Himself known to it. This,

however, is not the place to dwell upon them; but it is important to remark that which has great moral value, when what a free pardon really is to be set forth, that the exercise of grace on God's part creates (when received into the heart) sentiments corresponding to itself, and which nothing else can produce; and that these sentiments are in connection with that grace, and with the sense of sin it produces. It gives a deep consciousness of sin, but it is in connection with the sense of God's goodness; and the two feelings increase in mutual proportion. The new thing, sovereign grace, can alone produce these qualities, which answer to the nature of God Himself, whose true character the heart has apprehended, and with whom it is in communion; and that, while judging sin as it deserves in the presence of such a God.

It will be observed, that this is connected with the knowledge of Christ Himself, who is the manifestation of this character; the true source by grace of the feeling of this broken heart; and also that the knowledge of her pardon comes afterward.\* It is grace — it is Jesus Himself — His Person — that attracts this woman and produces the moral effect. She goes away in peace when she understands the extent of grace in the pardon which He pronounces. And the pardon itself has its force in her mind, in that Jesus was everything to her. If He forgave, she was satisfied. Without accounting for it to herself, it was God revealed to her heart; it was not self-approval, nor the judgment others might form of the change wrought in her. Grace had so taken possession of her heart — grace personified in Jesus — God was so manifested to her, that His approval in grace, His forgiveness, carried everything else with it. If He was satisfied, so was she. She had all in attaching this importance to Christ. Grace delights to bless, and the soul that attaches importance enough to Christ is content with the blessing it bestows. How striking is the firmness with which grace asserts itself, and does not fear to withstand the judgment of man who despises it! It takes unhesitatingly the part of the poor sinner whom it has touched. Man's judgment only proves that he neither knows nor appreciates God in the most perfect manifestation of His nature. To man, with all his wisdom, it is but a poor preacher, who deceives himself in passing for a prophet, and to whom it is not worth while to give a little water for his feet. To the believer it is perfect and divine love, it is perfect peace if he has faith in Christ. Its fruits are not yet before man; they are before God, if Christ is

appreciated. And he who appreciates Him thinks neither of himself nor of his fruits (except of the bad), but of the One who was the testimony of grace to his heart when he was nothing but a sinner.

[\* To explain the expression, “Her sins are forgiven, for she loved much,” we must distinguish between grace revealed in the Person of Jesus, and the pardon He announced to those whom the grace had reached. The Lord is able to make this pardon known. He reveals it to the poor woman. But it was that which she had seen in Jesus Himself, which, by grace, melted her heart and produced the love she had to Him — the seeing what He was for sinners like herself. She thinks only of Him: He has taken possession of her heart so as to shut out other influences. Hearing that He is there, she goes into the house of this proud man, without thinking of anything but the fact that Jesus is there. His presence answered, or prevented, every question. She saw what He was for a sinner, and that the most wretched and disgraced found a resource in Him; she felt her sins in the way that this perfect grace, which opens the heart and wins confidence, causes them to be felt; and she loved much. Grace in Christ had produced its effect. She loved because of His love. This is the reason that the Lord says, “Her sins are forgiven, because she loved much.” It was not that her love was meritorious for this, but that God revealed the glorious fact that the sins — be they ever so numerous and abominable — of one whose heart was turned to God were fully pardoned. There are many whose hearts are turned to God, and who love Jesus, that do not know this. Jesus pronounces on their case with authority — sends them away in peace. It is a revelation — and answer — to the wants and affections produced in the heart made penitent by grace revealed in the Person of Christ. If God manifests Himself in this world, and with such love, He must needs set aside in the heart every other consideration. And thus, without being aware of it, this poor woman was the only one who acted suitably in those circumstances; for she appreciated the all-importance of the One who was there. A Savior-God being present, of what importance was Simon and his house? Jesus caused all else to be forgotten. Let us remember this. The beginning of man’s fall was loss of confidence in God, by the seducing suggestion of Satan that God had kept back what would make man like God. Confidence in God lost, man seeks, in the exercise of his own will, to make himself happy: lusts, sin, transgression follow. Christ is God in infinite love, winning back the confidence of man’s heart to God. Removal of guilt, and power to live to God, are another thing, and found in their own place through Christ, as pardon comes in its place here. But the poor woman, through grace, had felt that there was one heart she could trust, if none else; but that was God’s. God is light and God is love. These are the two essential names of God, and in every true case of conversion both are found. In the cross they meet; sin is brought fully into the light, but in that by which love is fully known. So in the heart light reveals sin, that is God as light does, but the light is there by perfect love. The God who shows the sins is there in perfect love to do it. Christ was this in this world. Revealing Himself, He must be both; so Christ was love in the world, but the light of it. So in the heart. The love through grace gives confidence, and thus the light is gladly let in, and in the confidence in the love, and seeing self in the light, the heart has wholly met God’s heart: so with this poor woman. This

is where the heart of man and God always and alone meet. The Pharisee had neither. Pitch dark, neither love nor light were there. He had God manifest in the flesh in his house and saw nothing — only settled that He was not a prophet. It is a wondrous scene to see these three hearts. Man's as such resting on false human righteousness, God's, and the poor sinner's — fully meeting it as God did hers. Who was the child of wisdom? for it is a commentary on that expression. And note, though Christ had said nothing of it, but bowed to the slight, yet He was not insensible to the neglect which had not met Him with the common courtesies of life. To Simon He was a poor preacher, whose pretensions he could judge, certainly not a prophet; for the poor woman, God in love, and bringing her heart into unison with His as to her sins and as to herself, for love was trusted in. Note, too, this clinging to Jesus is where true light is found: here the fruitful revelation of the gospel; to Mary Magdalene, as to the highest privilege of saints.]

This is the new thing — grace, and even its fruits in their perfection: the heart of God manifested in grace, and the heart of man a sinner — responding to it by grace, having apprehended, or rather having been apprehended by, the perfect manifestation of that grace in Christ.

In **CHAPTER 8** the Lord explains the import and the effect of His ministry; and especially, I doubt not, its effect among the Jews.

However great the unbelief, Jesus carries on His work to the end, and the fruits of His work appear. He goes to preach the good news of the kingdom. His disciples (the fruit, and the witnesses by grace, in their measure, in the same manner as Himself, of His mighty word) accompany Him; and other fruits of this same word, witnesses also by their own deliverance from the power of the enemy, and by the affection and devotedness flowing from thence by grace — a grace which acted also in them, according to the love and devotedness that attach to Jesus. Here women have a good place.\* The work was strengthened and consolidated, and characterises itself by its effects.

[\* It is exceedingly interesting to see the distinct place of the disciples and the women. Nor, as said above, have the women a bad place. We find them again at the cross and the sepulchre when — at any rate save John — the disciples had fled, or, even if called by the women to the sepulchre, gone home! when they saw He was raised.]

The Lord explains its true nature. He did not take possession of the kingdom, He did not seek for fruit; He sowed the testimony of God in order to produce fruit. This, in a striking way, is the altogether new thing. The word was its seed. Moreover it was the disciples only — who had

followed and attached themselves to His Person, by grace and by virtue of the manifestation of the power and grace of God in His Person — to whom it was given to understand the mysteries, the thoughts of God, revealed in Christ, of this kingdom which was not being openly established by power. Here the remnant is very clearly distinguished from the nation. To “others” it was in parables, that they might not understand. For that the Lord Himself must be received morally. Here this parable is not accompanied by others. Alone it marks out the position. The warning, which we considered in Mark, is added. Finally the light of God was not manifested in order to be hidden. Moreover everything should be made manifest. Therefore they must take heed how they heard, for, if they possessed that which they heard, they should receive more: otherwise even that should be taken from them.

The Lord puts a seal upon this testimony, namely, that the thing in question was the word, which drew to Him and to God those who were to enjoy the blessing; and that the word was the basis of all relationship with Himself, declaring, when they spoke to Him of His mother and brethren, by whom He was related to Israel after the flesh, that He acknowledged as such none others but those who heard and obeyed the word of God.

Besides the evident power manifested in His miracles the accounts that follow — to the end of chapter 8 — present different aspects of the work of Christ, and of His reception, and of its consequences.

First the Lord — although, apparently, He takes no notice — is associated with His disciples in the difficulties and storms that surround them, because they have embarked in His service. We have seen that He gathered the disciples around Himself: they are devoted to His service. As far as man’s power to avert it went, they were in imminent danger. The waves are ready to swallow them up. Jesus, in their eyes, cares nothing about it; but God has permitted this exercise of faith. They are there on account of Christ, and with Him. Christ is with them; and the power of Christ, for whose sake they are in the storm, is there to protect them. They are together with Him in the same vessel. If as to themselves they might perish, they are associated in the counsels of God with Jesus, and His presence is their safeguard. He permits the storm, but He is Himself in the vessel. When He shall awake and manifest Himself, all will be calm.

In the healing of the demoniac, in the country of the Gadarenes, we have a living picture of what was passing.

As to Israel, the remnant — however great the enemy's power — is delivered. The world beseeches Jesus to depart, desiring their own ease, which is more disturbed by the presence and power of God than by a legion of devils. He goes away. The man who was healed — the remnant — would fain be with Him; but the Lord sends him back (into the world that He quitted Himself) to be a witness of the grace and power of which he had been the subject.

The herd of swine, I doubt not, set before us the career of Israel towards their destruction, after the rejection of the Lord. The world accustoms itself to the power of Satan — painful as it may be to see it in certain cases — never to the power of God.

The next two histories present the effect of faith, and the real need with which the grace that meets it has to do. The faith of the remnant seeks Jesus to preserve the life of that which is ready to perish. The Lord answers it, and comes Himself to answer it. On the way (it is there He was, and, as to final deliverance, He is still there), in the midst of the crowd that surrounded Him, faith touches Him. The poor woman had a disease which no means at man's disposal could heal. But power is found in the Man, Christ, and comes forth from Him for the healing of man, wherever faith exists, while waiting for the final accomplishment of His mission on earth. She is healed, and confesses before Christ her condition and all that had happened to her: and thus, by means of the effect of faith, testimony is rendered to Christ. The remnant is manifested, faith distinguishes them from the multitude; their condition being the fruit of divine power in Christ.

This principle applies to the healing of every believer, and, consequently, to that of the Gentiles, as the apostle argues. Healing power is in the Person of Christ; faith — by grace and by the attraction of Christ — profits by it. It does not depend on the relationship of the Jew, although, as to his position, he was the first to profit by it. It is a question of what there is in the Person of Christ, and of faith in the individual. If there is faith in the individual, this power acts; he goes away in peace, healed by the power of God Himself.

But, in fact, if we consider in full the condition of man, it was not sickness merely which was in question, but death. Christ, before the full manifestation of the state of man, met it, so to speak, on the way; but, as in the case of Lazarus, the manifestation was allowed; and to faith this manifestation took place in the death of Jesus. Thus, here, it is permitted that the daughter of Jairus should die before the arrival of Christ; but grace has come to raise from the dead, with the divine power that alone can accomplish it; and Jesus, in comforting the poor father, bids him not to fear, but only to believe, and his daughter should be made whole. It is faith in His Person, in the divine power in Him, in the grace that comes to exercise it, which obtains joy and deliverance. But Jesus does not seek the multitude here; the manifestation of this power is only for the consolation of those who feel their need of it, and for the faith of those who are really attached to Him. The multitude know, indeed, that the maiden is dead; they bewail her, and do not understand the power of God that can raise her up. Jesus gives back to her parents the child whose life He had restored. Thus will it be with the Jews at the end, in the midst of the unbelief of the many. Meantime by faith we anticipate this joy, convinced that it is our state by grace; we live: only that for us it is in connection with Christ in heaven, the firstfruits of a new creation.

With respect to His ministry, Jesus will have this hidden. He must be received according to the testimony which He bore to the conscience and to the heart. On the way this testimony was not entirely finished. We shall see His last efforts with the unbelieving heart of man in the succeeding chapters.

In **CHAPTER 9** the Lord charges the disciples with the same mission in Israel as that which He Himself fulfilled. They preach the kingdom, heal the sick, and cast out devils. But this is added, that their work takes the character of a final mission. Not that the Lord had ceased to work, for He also sent forth the seventy; but final in this sense, that it became a definite testimony against the people if they rejected it. The twelve were to shake off the dust from their feet on leaving the cities that would reject them. This is intelligible at the point we have reached in the Gospel. It is repeated, with a yet greater force, in the case of the seventy. We shall speak of it in the chapter that relates to their being sent forth. Their mission comes after the manifestation of His glory to the three disciples.



But the Lord as long as He was here continued His exercise of power in mercy, for it was what He personally was here, and sovereign goodness in Him was above all the evil He met with.

To go on with our chapter. That which follows verse 7 shows that the fame of His marvelous works had reached the ears of the king. Israel was without excuse. Whatever little conscience there was felt the effect of His power. The people also followed Him. Gone apart with the disciples, who had returned from their mission, He is soon surrounded by the multitude; again, their servant in grace, however great their unbelief, He preaches to them and heals all who needed it.

But He would give them a fresh and very especial proof of the divine power and presence that was among them. It had been said that in the time of Israel's blessing from the Lord, when He should make the horn of David to flourish, He would satisfy the poor with bread. Jesus now does so. But there is more than this here. We have seen throughout this Gospel that He exercises this power, in His humanity, by the unmeasured energy of the Holy Ghost. Hence a marvelous blessing for us, granted according to the sovereign counsels of God, through the perfect wisdom of Jesus in selecting His instruments. He will have the disciples do it. Nevertheless the power that performs it is all His own. The disciples see nothing beyond that which their eyes can estimate. But, if He who feeds them is Jehovah, He ever takes His place Himself in the dependence of the nature He had assumed. He retires with His disciples, and there, afar from the world, He prays. And, as in the two remarkable cases\* of the descent of the Holy Ghost and the selection of the Twelve, so here also His prayer is the occasion of the manifestation of His glory — glory which was due to Him, but which the Father gave Him as man, and in connection with the sufferings and the humiliation, which, in His love, He voluntarily underwent.

[\* Observe also here, that it is not only in the case of acts of power, or in that of testimony to the glory of His Person in answer to His prayer, that these prayers are offered. His conversation with the disciples respecting the change in the dispensations of God (in which He speaks of His sufferings, and forbids them to make Him known as the Christ) is introduced by His prayer when He was in a desert place with them. That His people were to be given up for a time occupied His heart as much as the glory. Moreover, He pours out His heart to God, whatever may be the subject that occupies Him according to the ways of God.]

The attention of the people was excited, but they did not go beyond the speculations of the human mind with regard to the Savior. The disciples' faith recognised without hesitation the Christ in Jesus. But He was no longer to be proclaimed as such — the Son of man was to suffer. Counsels more important, a glory more excellent than that of the Messiah, were to be realised: but it should be through suffering — suffering that, as to human trials, His disciples were to share by following Him. But in losing their life for Him, they would gain it; for in following Jesus, the eternal life of the soul was the question and not merely the kingdom. Moreover He who was now rejected would return in His own glory, namely, as Son of man (the character He takes in this Gospel), in the glory of the Father, for He was the Son of God, and in that of the angels as Jehovah the Savior, taking place above them, although (yea as) man: He was worthy of this, for He created them. The salvation of the soul, the glory of Jesus acknowledged according to His rights, everything warned them to confess Him while He was despised and disallowed. Now, to strengthen the faith of those whom He would make pillars, and through them the faith of all, He announces that some of them, before they tasted death (they should neither wait for death, in which the value of eternal life would be felt, nor for the return of Christ), should see the kingdom of God.

In consequence of this declaration, eight days later He took the three who afterwards were pillars, and went up into a mountain to pray. There He is transfigured. He appears in glory, and the disciples see it. But Moses and Elias share it with Him. The saints of the Old Testament have part with Him in the glory of the kingdom founded upon His death. They speak with Him of His decease. They had heretofore spoken of other things. They had seen the law set up, or had sought to bring the people back to it, for the introduction of blessing; but now that this new glory is the subject, all depends on the death of Christ, and on that alone. Everything else disappears. The heavenly glory of the kingdom and death are in immediate relationship. Peter sees only the introduction of Christ into a glory equal to theirs; connecting the latter in his mind with that which they both were to a Jew, and associating Jesus with it. It is then that the two disappear entirely, and Jesus remains alone. It was He alone whom they were to hear. The connection of Moses and Elias with Jesus in the glory, depended

on the rejection of their testimony by the people to whom they had addressed it.

But this is not all. The church, properly so called, is not seen here. But the sign of the excellent glory, of the presence of God, shows itself — the cloud in which Jehovah dwelt in Israel. Jesus brings the disciples to it as witnesses. Moses and Elias disappear, and, Jesus having brought the disciples close to the glory, the God of Israel manifests Himself as the Father, and owns Jesus as the Son in whom He delighted. All is changed in the relationships of God with man. The Son of man, put to death on earth, is owned in the excellent glory to be the Son of the Father. The disciples know Him thus by the testimony of the Father, are associated with Him, and, as it were, introduced into connection with the glory in which the Father Himself thus acknowledged Jesus — in which the Father and the Son are found. Jehovah makes Himself known as Father by revealing the Son. And the disciples find themselves associated on earth with the abode of glory, from whence, at all times, Jehovah Himself had protected Israel. Jesus was there with them, and He was the Son of God. What a position! What a change for them! It is, in fact, the change from all that was most excellent in Judaism to connection with the heavenly glory, which was wrought at that moment, in order to make all things new.\*

[\* It is the display of the kingdom, not of the church in heavenly places. I suppose the words “they entered” must refer to Moses and Elias. But the cloud overshadowed the disciples. Yet it carries us beyond that display. The word “overshadowed” is the same as that used by the LXX for the cloud coming and filling the tabernacle. We learn from Matthew it was a bright cloud. It was the Shekinah of glory which had been with Israel in the wilderness — I may say the Fathers house. His voice came from it. Into this they entered. It is this in Luke that makes the disciples afraid. God had talked with Moses out of it; but here they enter into it. Thus, besides the kingdom, there is the proper dwelling-place of the saints. This is found in Luke only. We have the kingdom, Moses and Elias in the same glory with the Son, and others in flesh on the earth, but the heavenly sojourn of the saints also.]

The personal profit of this passage is great, in that it reveals to us, in a very striking manner, the heavenly and glorious state. The saints are in the same glory as Jesus, they are with Him, they converse familiarly with Him, they converse on that which is nearest to His heart — on His sufferings and death. They speak with the sentiments that flow from circumstances which affect the heart. He was to die in the beloved

Jerusalem, instead of their receiving the kingdom. They speak as understanding the counsels of God; for the thing had not yet taken place. Such are the relationships of the saints with Jesus in the kingdom. For, up to this point, it is the manifestation of the glory as the world will see it, with the addition of the intercourse between the glorified and Jesus. The three were standing on the mountain. But the three disciples go beyond thus. They are taught of the Father. His own affections for His Son are made known to them. Moses and Elias have born testimony to Christ, and shall be glorified with Him; but Jesus now remains alone for the church. This is more than the kingdom, it is fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus (not understood, assuredly, at that time, but now is by the power of the Holy Ghost). It is wonderful, this entrance of the saints into the excellent glory, into the Shekinah, the abode of God; and these revelations on God's part of His own affections for His Son. This is more than the glory. Jesus, however, is always the object that fills the scene for us. Observe also for our position down here, that the Lord speaks as intimately of His death to His disciples on the earth as to Moses and Elias. These are not more intimate with Him than are Peter, James, and John. Sweet and precious thought! And mark how thin a veil there is between us and what is heavenly.\*

[\* Note too that if Jesus takes up the disciples to see the glory of the kingdom, and the entrance of the saints into the excellent glory where the Father was, He came down also and met the crowd of this world and the power of Satan where we have to walk.]

That which follows is the application of this revelation to the state of things below. The disciples are unable to profit by the power of Jesus, already manifested, to cast out the power of the enemy. And this justifies God in that which was revealed of His counsels on the mount, and leads to the setting aside of the Jewish system, in order to introduce their fulfillment. But this does not hinder the action of the grace of Christ in delivering men while He was yet with them, until man had finally rejected Him. But, without noticing the fruitless astonishment of the people, He insists with His disciples on His rejection and on His crucifixion; carrying this principle on to the renunciation of self, and the humility which would receive that which was least.

In the remainder of the chapter, from verse 46, the Gospel gives us the different features of selfishness and of the flesh that are in contrast with the grace and devotedness manifested in Christ, and that tend to prevent the believer from walking in His steps. Verses 46-48; 49, 50; 51-56, respectively, present examples\* of this; and, from 57 to 62, the contrast between the illusive will of man and the efficacious call of grace; the discovery of the repugnance of the flesh, when there is a true call; and the absolute renunciation of all things, in order to obey it, are set before us by the Spirit of God.\*\*

[\* These three passages point out, each in succession, a more subtle selfishness less easily detected by man: gross personal selfishness, corporate selfishness, and the selfishness that clothes itself with the appearance of zeal for the Lord, but which is not likeness to Him.]

[\*\* Observe that, when the will of man acts, he does not feel the difficulties, but he is not qualified for the work. When there is a true call, the hindrances are felt.]

The Lord (in reply to the spirit that sought the aggrandisement of their own company on earth, forgetful of the cross) expresses to the disciples that which He did not conceal from Himself, the truth of God, that all were in such wise against them that, if any one were not so, he was even thereby for them. So thoroughly did the presence of Christ test the heart. The other reason, given elsewhere, is not repeated here. The Spirit, in this connection, confines Himself to the point of view we are considering. Thus rejected, the Lord judges no one. He does not avenge Himself; He was come to save men's lives. That a Samaritan should repulse the Messiah was, to the disciples, worthy of destruction. Christ came to save the lives of men. He submits to the insult, and goes elsewhere. There were some who wished to serve Him here below. He had no home to which He could take them. Meantime, for this very reason, the preaching of the kingdom was the only thing to His unwearying love; the dead (to God) might bury the dead. He who was called, who was alive, must be occupied with one thing, with the kingdom, to bear testimony to it; and that without looking back, the urgency of the matter lifting him above all other thoughts. He who had put his hand to the plough must not look back. The kingdom, in presence of the enmity — the ruin — of man, of all that opposed it, required the soul to be wholly absorbed in its interests by the power of

God. The work of God, in the presence of Christ's rejection, demanded entire consecration.

The mission of the seventy follows in chapter 10, a mission important in its character for the development of the ways of God.

This character is, in fact, different in some respects from that of the beginning of chapter 9. The mission is founded on the glory of Christ manifested in chapter 9. This of necessity, settles the question more decisively of the Lord's relations with the Jews: for His glory came after, and, as to His human position, was the result of His rejection by the nation.

This rejection was not yet accomplished: this glory was only revealed to three of His disciples; so that the Lord still exercised His ministry among the people. But we see these alterations in it. He insists on that which is moral and eternal, the position into which it would bring His disciples, the true effect of His testimony in the world, and the judgment about to fall upon the Jews. Nevertheless the harvest was great. For love, unchilled by sin, saw the need through the outward opposition; but there were few moved by this love. The Lord of the harvest alone could send forth true laborers.

Already the Lord announces that they are as lambs among wolves. What a change from the presentation of the kingdom to the people of God! They were to trust (like the twelve) to the care of the Messiah present on the earth, and who influenced the heart with divine power. They were to go as the Lord's laborers, openly avowing their object, not toiling for their food, but as having claims on His part. Wholly devoted to their work, they were to salute no one. Time pressed. Judgment was coming. There were those in Israel who were not children of peace. The remnant would be distinguished by the effect of their mission on the heart, not yet judicially. But peace should rest on the children of peace. These messengers exercised the power gained by Jesus over the enemy, and which He could thus bestow (and this was much more than a miracle); and they were to declare unto those whom they visited that the kingdom of God had come nigh unto them. Important testimony! When the judgment was not executed, it required faith to recognise it in a testimony. If they were not received, they were to denounce the city, assuring them that, received or not, the kingdom of God

had come nigh. What a solemn testimony, now that Jesus was going to be rejected — a rejection that filled up the measure of man's iniquity! It would be more tolerable for infamous Sodom, in the day that judgment should be executed, than for that city.

This clearly points out the character of the testimony. The Lord denounces\* the cities in which He had wrought, and assures His disciples that to reject them in their mission was the same thing as to reject Him, and that, in rejecting Him, He who had sent Him was rejected — the God of Israel — the Father. On their return they announce the power that had accompanied their mission; demons were subject to their word. The Lord replies that in effect these tokens of power had made present to His mind the full establishment of the kingdom — Satan cast out entirely from heaven (an establishment of which these miracles were only a sample); but that there was something more excellent than this, and in which they might rejoice — their names were written in heaven. The power manifested was true, its results sure, in the establishment of the kingdom but something else was beginning to appear — a heavenly people were dawning, who should have their portion with Him, whom the unbelief of the Jews and of the world was driving back to heaven.

[\* In verse 25 of this chapter, as well as in chapter 13:34, we have examples of the moral order in Luke, of which we have spoken (p. 232). The testimonies of the Lord are perfectly in place. They are of infinite assistance in understanding the whole connection of the passage, and their position here throws great light on their own meaning. Historical order is not the question here. The position taken by Israel — by the disciples — by all, through the rejection of Christ, is the subject of which the Holy Ghost treats. These passages relate to it, and show very plainly the condition of the people who had been visited by Jesus, their true character, the counsels of God in bringing in the heavenly things through the fall of Israel, and the connection between the rejection of Christ and the introduction of the heavenly things, and of eternal life, and of the soul. Nevertheless the law was not broken. In fact its place was taken by grace, which, outside the law, did that which could not be done through the law. We shall see this in going on with our chapter.]

This very clearly unfolds the position now taken. The testimony of the kingdom rendered in power, leaving Israel without excuse, Jesus passed into another position — into the heavenly one. This was the true subject of joy. The disciples, however, did not yet understand it. But the Person and the power of Him who was to introduce them into the heavenly glory

of the kingdom, His right to the glorious kingdom of God, have been revealed to them by the Father. The blinding of human pride, and the Father's grace towards babes, became Him, who fulfilled the counsels of His sovereign grace through the humiliation of Jesus, and were in accordance with His heart who came to fulfill them. Moreover all things were given to Jesus. The Son was too glorious to be known, save by the Father, who was Himself only known by the revelation of the Son. To Him must men come. The root of the difficulty in receiving Him lay in the glory of His Person, who was known only to the Father, and this action and glory of the Father, which needed the Son Himself to reveal it. All this was in Jesus there on earth. But He could tell His disciples in private that, having seen in Him the Messiah and His glory, they had seen that which kings and prophets had in vain desired to see. The Father had been proclaimed to them, yet they but little understood it. In the mind of God it was their portion, realised afterwards by the presence of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of adoption.

We may remark here, the power of the kingdom bestowed on the disciples; their enjoyment at that moment (by the presence of the Messiah Himself, bringing with Him the power of the kingdom which overthrew that of the enemy) of the sight of those things of which the prophets had spoken; at the same time the rejection of their testimony, and the judgment of Israel among whom it was rendered; and, finally, the call of the Lord (while acknowledging in their work all the power that shall establish the kingdom) to rejoice, not in the kingdom thus established on earth, but in that sovereign grace of God who, in His eternal counsels, had granted them a place and a name in heaven, in connection with their rejection on earth. The importance of this chapter is evident in this point of view. Luke constantly brings in the better and unseen part in a heavenly world.

The extent of the dominion of Jesus in connection with this change, and the revelation of the counsels of God that accompanied it, are given us in verse 22, as well as the discovery of the relationships and the glory of the Father and of the Son; at the same time also the grace shown to the humble according to the character and the rights of God the Father Himself. Afterwards we find the development of the change as to moral character. The teacher of the law desires to know the conditions of eternal life. This is not the kingdom, nor heaven, but a part of the Jewish apprehension of



the relationship of man with God. The possession of life was proposed to the Jews by the law. It had, by scriptural developments subsequent to the law, been discovered to be eternal life, which they then, at least the Pharisees, attached as such to the observance of that law — a thing possessed by the glorified in heaven, by the blessed on earth during the millennium, which we now possess in earthen vessels; which the law, as interpreted by conclusions drawn from the prophetic books, proposed as the result of obedience:\* “The man that doeth these things shall live by them.”

[\* It is to be remarked, that the Lord never used the word eternal life in speaking of the effect of obedience. “The gift of God is eternal life.” If they had been obedient, that life might have been endless; but in fact and truth, now that sin had entered, obedience was not the way to have eternal life, and the Lord does not so state it.]

The lawyer therefore asks what it is that he must do. The answer was plain: the law (with all its ordinances, its ceremonies, all the conditions of God’s government, which the people had broken, and the violation of which led to the judgment announced by the prophets — judgment that should be followed by the establishment, on God’s part, of the kingdom in grace) the law, I say, contained the kernel of the truth in this respect, and distinctly expressed the conditions of life, if man was to enjoy it according to human righteousness — righteousness wrought by himself, by which he himself should live. These conditions were summed up in a very few words — to love God perfectly, and one’s neighbor as oneself. The lawyer giving this summary, the Lord accepts it and repeats the words of the Lawgiver: “This do, and thou shalt live.” But man has not done it and is conscious that he has not. As to God he is far away; man easily gets rid of Him; he will render Him some outward services and make his boast in them. But man is near; his selfishness makes him alive to the performance of this precept, which, if observed, would be his happiness — make this world a kind of paradise. Disobedience to it is repeated every moment, in the circumstances of each day, which bring this selfishness into play. All that surrounds him (his social ties) makes man conscious of these violations of this precept, even when the soul would not of itself be troubled about it. Here the lawyer’s heart betrays itself. Who, he asks, is my neighbor?

The Lord's answer exhibits the moral change which has taken place through the introduction of grace — through the manifestation of this grace in man, in His own Person. Our relationships with one another are now measured by the divine nature in us, and this nature is love. Man under the law measured himself by the importance he could attach to himself, which is always the opposite of love. The flesh gloried in a nearness to God which was not real, which did not belong to participation in His nature. The priest and the Levite pass by on the other side. The Samaritan, despised as such, did not ask who was his neighbor. The love that was in his heart made him a neighbor to any one who was in need. This is what God Himself did in Christ; but then legal and carnal distinctions disappeared before this principle. The love that acted according to its own impulses found the occasion of its exercise in the need that came before it.

Here ends this part of the Lord's discourses. A new subject begins in verse 38.

From that verse to the end of verse 13 in chapter 11 the Lord makes known to His disciples the two great means of blessing — the word and prayer. In connection with the word, we find the energy that attaches itself to the Lord, in order to receive it from Himself, and that leaves everything in order to hear His word, because the soul is laid hold of by the communications of God in grace. We may remark that these circumstances are connected with the change that had been wrought at that solemn moment. The reception of the word takes the place of the attentions that were due to the Messiah. These attentions were demanded by the presence of a Messiah on the earth; but, seeing the condition man was in (for he rejected the Savior), he needed the word; and Jesus, in His perfect love, will have nothing else. For man, for the glory of God, but one thing was needful; and it is that which Jesus desires. As to Himself, He would go without everything for that. But Martha, though preparing for the Lord, which was right surely, yet shows how much self is inherent in this kind of care; for she did not like to have all the trouble of it.

The prayer which He taught His disciples (chap. 11) has respect also to the position into which they came before the gift of the Holy Ghost.\* Jesus Himself prayed, as the dependent man on earth. He had not yet received the promise of the Father, in order to pour it out on His disciples,

and could not till His ascension into heaven. These, however, are in relationship with God as their Father. The glory of His name, the coming of His kingdom, were to occupy their first thoughts. They depended on Him for their daily bread. They needed pardon, and to be kept from temptation. The prayer comprised the desire of a heart true to God; the need of the body committed to their Father's care; the grace required for their walk when they had sinned, and in order that their flesh should not manifest itself, that they might be saved from the power of the enemy.

[\* The desire to have a form of prayer given by the Lord has led to a corruption of the text here, recognised by all who have seriously inquired into it (the object being to conform the prayer here to that given in Matthew). It runs thus: "Father, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, give us each day our needed bread, and forgive us our sins, for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us, and lead us not into temptation."

The Lord then dwells on perseverance, that petitions should not be those of a heart indifferent to the result. He assures them that their prayers should not be in vain; also, that their heavenly Father would give the Holy Spirit to those that asked Him. He puts them into His own relationship on earth with God. Harkening to God, applying to Him as a Father — it is the whole of practical christian life.

Afterwards the two great weapons of His testimony are shown forth, namely, casting out demons, and the authority of His word. He had manifested the power that cast out demons; they attributed it to the prince of the demons. Nevertheless He had bound the strong man; He had spoiled his goods; and this proved that the kingdom of God was indeed come. In such a case as this, God being come to deliver man, everything took its true place; everything was either of the devil, or of the Lord. Moreover, if the unclean spirit had gone out and God was not there, the wicked spirit would come back with others more wicked than himself; and the last state is worse than the first.

These things were taking place at that time. But miracles were not all. He had proclaimed the word. A woman, sensible to the joy of having a son like Jesus, declares aloud the value of such a relationship to Him after the flesh; the Lord puts this blessing, as He did in the case of Mary, on those who heard and kept His word. The Ninevites had hearkened to Jonah, the queen of Sheba to Solomon, without even one miracle being wrought; and a

greater than Jonah was now among them. There were two things there — the testimony plainly set forth (v. 33), and the motives which governed those that heard it. If the true light shone fully into the heart, there remained no darkness in it. If the perfect truth was presented according to God's own wisdom, it was the heart that rejected it. The eye was evil. The notions and motives of a heart at a distance from God only darkened it: a heart that had but one object, God and His glory, would be full of light. Moreover light does not merely display itself, it enlightens all around it. If God's light were in the soul, it would be full of it and no part dark.

Verses 37-52. Invited to the Pharisee's house, He judges the condition of the nation, and the hypocrisy of its pretended righteousness, putting His finger on the whited show and inward covetousness and self-seeking, the making God's law burdensome to others, while neglecting the fulfillment of it themselves, announcing the mission of the apostles and prophets of the New Testament, the rejection of whom would fill up the measure of Israel's iniquity, and bring to a final test those who hypocritically built the tombs of the prophets their fathers had killed. And then all the blood, with respect to which God had exercised His long-suffering, sending testimonies to enlighten the people, and which had been shed on account of those testimonies, should at length be required at the hand of the rebels. The Lord's words did but stir up the malice of the Pharisees, who sought to entangle Him in His talk. In a word we have, on one side, the word of the testimony set in full relief, in place of the Messiah fulfilling the promises; and, on the other, the judgment of a nation that had rejected both, and would also reject even that which should afterwards be sent to bring them back.

**CHAPTER 12** puts the disciples into this place of testimony by the power of the Holy Ghost, and with the world opposed to them, after the Lord's departure. It is the word and the Holy Ghost, instead of the Messiah on the earth. They were neither to fear opposition, nor to trust in themselves, but to fear God and trust to His help; and the Holy Ghost would teach them what to say. All things should be revealed. God reaches the soul: man can only touch the body. Here that which goes beyond present promises, the connection of the soul with God, is put forward. It is coming out from Judaism to be before God. Their calling was to manifest God in the world at all costs — to manifest Him to faith before all things were made

manifest. It might cost them dear before men: Jesus would confess them before angels. It is bringing the disciples into the light as God is in it, and the fear of God by the word and faith when the power of evil was present; all that evil, however secret, would be brought to light.

Nor this only. Blasphemy against the witness given would, in their case, be worse than blaspheming Christ. This might be forgiven (it has been indeed, and will be at the end to the Jews as a nation); but whosoever spoke in blasphemy against the testimony of the disciples blasphemed against the Holy Ghost. It should not be forgiven. But the Lord deals with their heart as well as with their conscience. He encourages them by three things: 1st, the protection of Him who counted the hairs of their head, whatever might be the trials of their faith; 2nd, the fact that, in heaven and before the angels, their faithfulness to Christ in this painful mission should be acknowledged by Him; and 3rd, the importance of their mission, its rejection being more fatally condemning than the rejection of Christ Himself. God had taken a step, and a final step, in His grace and in His testimony. The bringing to light of all things, the care of God, their being confessed by Christ in heaven, the power of the Holy Ghost with them — these are the motives and the encouragements here given to the disciples for their mission after the Lord's departure.

That which follows brings out yet more distinctly the position in which the disciples were placed, according to the counsels of God, by the rejection of Christ (v. 13). The Lord formally refuses to execute justice in Israel. This was not His place. He deals with souls, and directs their attention to another life which outlasts the present; and, instead of dividing the inheritance between the brothers, He warns the multitude to beware of covetousness, instructing them by the parable of the rich man who was suddenly called hence in the midst of his projects. What became of his soul?

But, having established this general basis, He turns to His disciples and teaches them the great practical principles that were to guide their walk. They were not to think of the morrow, but to trust in God. Moreover they had no power over it. Let them seek the kingdom of God, and all that they needed should be added. This was their position in the world that rejected Him. But besides the Father's heart was interested in them: they were to

fear nothing. It was the Father's good pleasure to give them the kingdom. Strangers and pilgrims here, their treasure was to be in heaven; and thus their heart would be there also.\* Besides this, they were to wait for the Lord. Three things were to influence their souls: the Father would give them the kingdom, their heart's treasure in heaven, and the expectation of the Lord's return. Until the Lord should come, they were required to watch — to have their lamps burning; their whole position should manifest the effect of the continual expectation of the Lord — should express this expectation. They were to be as men who waited for Him with their loins girded; and in that case, when all should be according to the Lord's own heart, re-established by His power, and they brought into His Father's house, He would make them sit down, and, in His turn, gird Himself to serve them.

[\* Observe here, that the heart follows the treasure. It is not, as men say, where your heart is, your treasure is — my heart is not in it; but "where your treasure is, there win your heart be also."

It is of all importance to fix the attention of the reader on the point, that what the Lord looks for here is not the holding, however clearly, the Lord's coming at the end of the age, but that the Christian should be waiting for Him, in a full profession of Christ, and his heart in spiritual order. Such, the Lord will make to sit down as guests, but such for ever, in His Father's house where He has brought them, and will Himself in love minister the blessing. This love will make the blessings ten thousand fold more precious, all received from His hand. Love likes to serve, selfishness to be served. But He did not come to be ministered to. This love He will never give up.

Nothing can be more exquisite than the grace expressed in these verses, 35 and 37.\*

[\* Here we have the heavenly portion of those who wait for the Lord during His absence. It is the character of the we disciple in his heavenly aspect, as service in his place on earth. Observe also that the Lord was a servant down here. According to John 13 He becomes a servant on ascending to heaven, an Advocate, to wash our feet. In this place He makes Himself a servant for our blessing in heaven. In Exodus 21, if the servant who had fulfilled his service did not wish to go out free, he was brought to the judges, and was fastened to the door by an awl which bored his ear in token of perpetual bondage. Jesus had perfectly accomplished His service to His Father at the end of His life on earth. In Psalm 40 His "ears were digged" (that is, a body prepared,

which is the position of obedience: compare Philippians 2). This is the incarnation. Now His service was finished in His life on earth as man, but He loved us too much — He loved His Father too much in the character of servant — to give it up; and at His death His ear, according to Exodus 21, was bored, and He became servant for ever — a man for ever — now to wash our feet; hereafter in heaven, when He shall take us to Himself according to the passage we are considering. What a glorious picture of the love of Christ.]

On the inquiry of Peter, desirous of knowing to whom Jesus addressed these instructions, the Lord refers him to the responsibility of those to whom He committed duties during His absence. Thus we have the two things that characterise the disciples after the rejection of Christ — the expectation of His return, and service. The expectation, the vigilance that watches with girded loins to receive Him, finds its reward in rest, and in the feast (happiness ministered by Him) at which Jesus girds Himself to serve them; faithfulness in service, by having rule over all that belongs to the Lord of glory. We have seen, besides these special relationships between the walk of the disciples and their position in the world to come, the general truth of the renunciation of the world in which the Savior had been rejected, and the possession of the kingdom by the gift of the Father.

In that which He says afterwards of the service of those who bear His name during His absence, the Lord also points out those who will be in this position, but unfaithful; thus characterising those who, while publicly exercising ministry in the church, should have their portion with the unbelievers. The secret of the evil that characterises their unbelief would be found in this, that their hearts would put off the return of Jesus, instead of desiring it and hastening it by their aspirations, and serving with humility in the desire of being found faithful. They will say, He is not coming immediately; and, in consequence, they will do their own will, accommodate themselves to the spirit of the world, and assume authority over their fellow-servants. What a picture of that which has taken place! But their Master (for He was so, although they had not truly served Him) would come at a moment when they did not expect Him, as a thief in the night; and, although professing to be His servants, they should have their portion with unbelievers. Nevertheless there would be a difference between the two; for the servant who knew his own Master's will and did not make ready for Him, as the fruit of his expectations, and did not perform his Master's will, should be severely punished; whilst he who had

not the knowledge of His will should be punished less severely. I have added “own” to the word “Master,” according to the original, which signifies a recognised relationship with the Lord, and its consequent obligation. The other was ignorant of the explicit will of the Lord, but he committed the evil which in any case he ought not to have done. It is the history of true and false servants of Christ, of the professing church, and of the world in general. But there cannot be a more solemn testimony as to what brought unfaithfulness into the church, and led to its ruin and approaching judgment, namely, the giving up the present expectation of the Lord’s coming.

If it shall be required of persons according to their advantages, who will be so guilty as those that call themselves the ministers of the Lord, if they do not serve Him as in expectation of His return?

Nevertheless the Lord, thus rejected, was come to bring conflict and fire on the earth. His presence kindled it even before His rejection, in the baptism of death through which He was to pass, was accomplished. It was not, however, till after this that His love would have full liberty to develop itself in power. Thus His heart, which was love even according to the infinitude of the Godhead, was straitened until the atonement gave free course to it, and to the accomplishment of all the purposes of God, in which His power should be manifested according to that love, and to which this atonement was absolutely necessary as the basis of the reconciliation of all things in heaven and earth.\*

[\* It is blessed to see here how, let evil in man be what it may, it after all leads to the accomplishment of the counsels of His grace. The unbelief of man drove back divine love into the heart of Christ, unweakened surely, but unable to flow forth and express itself; but its full effect on the cross made it flow forth unhindered, in grace that reigns through righteousness, to the vilest. It is a singularly interesting and blessed passage.]

Verse 51-53. He shows in detail the divisions that would be the result of His mission. The world would no more endure faith in the Savior than it did the Savior Himself, who was its object and whom it confessed. It is well to note how the presence of the Savior draws out the evil of the human heart. The state described here is in Micah, the description of the most dreadful state of evil conceivable (Micah 7:1-7).



He then addresses Himself to the people, to warn them of the existing signs of the times in which they lived. He puts this testimony on a twofold ground: the evident signs which God gave; and the moral proofs which, even without the signs, conscience ought to acknowledge, and which thus oblige them to receive the testimony.

Be they ever so blind, they are in the way to the judge. Once delivered up, they should not come out till the chastisement of God was fully executed upon them.\* (compare Isaiah 40:2).

[\* Let us here, in a note, sum up the contents of these two chapters, that we may better understand the instruction they contain. In the first (12) the Lord speaks, in order to detach the thoughts of all from this world — to the disciples, by directing them to Him who had power over the soul as well as the body, and encouraging them with the knowledge of their Father's faithful care, and His purposes to give them the kingdom; meanwhile they were to be strangers and pilgrims, without anxiety as to all that happened around them — to the multitude, by showing them that the most prosperous man could not secure one day of life. But He adds something positive. His disciples were to expect Him from day to day, constantly. Not only should heaven be their portion, but there they should possess all things. They shall sit at meat, and He Will Himself serve them. This is the heavenly portion of the church at the Lords return. In service until He comes — service that requires incessant watchfulness; it will then be His turn to serve them. We next have their inheritance, and the judgment of the professing church and of the world. His teaching produced division, instead of establishing the kingdom in power. But He must die. This leads to another subject — the present judgment of the Jews. They were on the road, with God, towards judgment (chap. 13). The government of God would not manifest itself by distinguishing the wicked in Israel through partial judgments. All should perish, unless they repented. The Lord was cultivating the fig-tree for the final year; if the people of God did not bring forth fruit, it spoilt His garden. To make a pretense of the law in opposition to a God present with them (even He who had given them the law) was hypocrisy. The kingdom was not to be established by the manifestation on earth of the King's power. It should grow from a little seed until it became an immense system of power in the earth, and a doctrine which, as a system, should penetrate the whole mass. On inquiry being made whether the remnant was numerous, He insists upon entrance by the narrow gate of conversion, and of faith in Himself; for many would seek to enter into the kingdom and not be able: when once the Master of the house had risen up and shut the door (that is, Christ being rejected of Israel), in vain should they say that He had been in their cities. Workers of iniquity should not enter into the kingdom. The Lord is speaking here entirely of the Jews. They shall see the patriarchs, the prophets — Gentiles even from all parts — in the kingdom, and themselves outside. Nevertheless the accomplishment of the rejection of Christ did not depend on the will of man, of the false king who sought, by the Pharisees' account, to get rid of Him. The purposes of God, and alas! the iniquity of man, were

fulfilled together. Jerusalem was to fill up the measure of her iniquity. It could not be that a prophet should perish except at Jerusalem. But then the putting man to the proof in his responsibility closes in the rejection of Jesus. He speaks, in touching and magnificent language, as Jehovah Himself. How many times this God of goodness would have gathered the children of Zion under His wings, and they would not! As far as depended on the will of man, it was complete separation and desolation. And in fact it was so. All was over now for Israel with Jehovah, but not for Jehovah with Israel. It was the prophet's part to reckon on the faithfulness of his God and — assured that this could not fail, and that, if judgments came, it would only be for a time — to say, "How long?" (Isaiah 6:11; Psalm 79:5). Distress is complete when there is no faith, no one to say, "How long?" (Psalm 74:9). But here the great Prophet Himself is rejected. Nevertheless asserting His rights of grace, as Jehovah, He declares to them, unasked, the end of their desolation. "Ye shall not see me until ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." This sudden manifestation of the rights of His divinity, and of His divinity itself, in grace, when as to their responsibility all was lost in spite of His gracious culture, is surpassingly beautiful. It is God Himself who appears at the end of all His dealings. We see from this recapitulation that chapter 12 gives us the heavenly portion of the church, heaven, and the life to come; chapter 13 adding to it (with verses 54-59 of chapter 17) the government of Israel and of the earth, with the outward form of that which should replace it here below.]

Now, at this moment (chap. 13) they reminded Him of a terrible judgment that had fallen upon some among them. He declares to them that neither this case, nor another which He recalls to their minds, is exceptional: that except they repent, the same thing should happen to them all. And He adds a parable in order to make them understand their position. Israel was the fig-tree in the vineyard of God. For three years He had been threatening to cut it down; it did but spoil His vineyard — did but encumber and uselessly cover the ground. But Jesus was trying for the last time all that could be done to make it bear fruit; if this did not succeed, grace could but make way for the just judgment of the Master of the vineyard. Why cultivate that which only did harm?

Nevertheless He acts in grace and in power towards the daughter of Abraham, according to the promises made to that people, and demonstrates that their resistance, pretending to oppose the law to grace, was but hypocrisy.

However (v. 18-21) the kingdom of God was to take an unexpected form in consequence of His rejection. Sown by the word, and not introduced in power, it would grow on the earth until it became a worldly power; and, as

an outward profession and doctrine, would penetrate the whole sphere prepared for it in the sovereign counsels of God. Now this was not the kingdom established in power acting in righteousness, but as left to the responsibility of man, although the counsels of God were being accomplished.

At last, the Lord takes up, in a direct manner, the question of the position of the remnant and of the fate of Jerusalem (v. 22-35).

As He went through the cities and villages, fulfilling the work of grace, in spite of the contempt of the people, some one asked Him whether the remnant, those that would escape the judgment of Israel, should be many. He does not reply as to the number; but addresses Himself to the conscience of the inquirer, urging him to put forth all his energy that he might enter in at the strait gate. Not only would the multitude not enter in, but many, neglecting that gate, would desire to enter into the kingdom and not be able. And moreover, when once the master of the house was risen up, and the door was shut, it would be too late. He would say unto them, "I know you not, whence ye are." They would plead that He had been in their city. He would declare that He knew them not, workers of iniquity: there was "no peace for the wicked." The gate of the kingdom was moral, real before God — conversion. The multitude of Israel would not go in at it; and outside, in tears and anguish, they should see the Gentiles sitting with the depositaries of the promises; while they, the children of the kingdom, according to the flesh, were shut out, and so much the more miserable that they had been nigh unto it. And those who had appeared to be first should be the last, and the last first.

The Pharisees, under pretense of consideration for the Lord, advise Him to go away. Thereupon He refers finally to the will of God as to the fulfillment of His work. It was no question of the power of man over Him. He should accomplish His work, and then go away; because Jerusalem had not known the time of her visitation. Himself, her true Lord, Jehovah, how often would He have gathered the children of this rebellious city under His wings, and they would not! Now His last effort in grace was accomplished, and their house left desolate, until they should repent, and, returning to the Lord, say according to Psalm 111, "Blessed is he that

cometh in the name of the Lord.” Then He would appear, and they should see Him.

Nothing can be plainer than the connection and the force of these conversations. For Israel it was the last message, the last visitation of God. They rejected it. They were forsaken of God (though still beloved) until they should call upon Him whom they had rejected. Then this same Jesus would appear again, and Israel should see Him. This would be the day that the Lord had made.

His rejection — admitting the establishment of the kingdom as a tree and as leaven, during His absence — bore its fruit among the Jews until the end; and the revival amid that nation in the last days, and the return of Jesus on their repentance, will have reference to that great act of sin and rebellion. But this gives rise to further important instructions with regard to the kingdom.

Some moral details are unfolded in the next chapter (14).<sup>\*</sup> The Lord, being invited to eat with a Pharisee, vindicates the rights of grace over that which was the seal of the old covenant, judging the hypocrisy which at any rate broke the sabbath when their own interest was in question. He then shows the spirit of humility and lowliness that became man in the presence of God, and the union of this spirit with love when there was the possession of worldly advantages. By such a walk, which was indeed His own, in opposition to the spirit of the world, one’s place there would be lost; the reciprocations of society would not exist: but another hour was beginning to dawn through His rejection, and which in fact was its necessary consequence — the resurrection of the just. Cast out by the world from its bosom, they should have their place apart in that which the power of God should effect. There would be a resurrection of the just. Then should they have the reward of all that they had done through love to the Lord and for His name’s sake. We see the force with which this allusion applies to the Lord’s position at that moment, ready to be put to death in this world.

[\* Chapters 15 and 16 present the sovereign energy of grace, its fruits, and its consequences, in contrast with all apparent earthly blessing, and God’s government on earth in Israel, and the old covenant. The fourteenth, before entering on that full revelation, shows us the place to be taken in such a world as this, in view of the distributive justice of God, of the judgment He will execute when He comes. Self-exaltation in this world leads to humiliation. Self-humiliation — taking the lowest place according to what

we are, on the one side, and, on the other, to act in love — leads to exaltation on the part of Him who judges morally. After this we have set before us, the responsibility that flows from the presentation of grace; and that which it costs in a world like this. In a word, sin existing there, to exalt oneself is ministering to it; it is selfishness, and the love of the world in which it unfolds itself. One sinks morally. It is being far from God morally. When love acts, It is representing God to the men of this world. Nevertheless it is at the cost of all things that we become His disciples.]

And the kingdom, what would then become of it? With reference to it at that moment, the Lord gives its picture in the parable of the great supper of grace (v. 16-24). Despised by the chief part of the Jews, when God invited them to come in, He then sought out the poor of the flock. But there was room in His house, and He sends out to seek the Gentiles, and bring them in by His call that went forth in efficacious power when they sought Him not. It was the activity of His grace. The Jews, as such, should have no part in it. But those who entered in must count the cost (v. 25-33). All must be forsaken in this world; every link with this world must be broken. The nearer anything was to the heart, the more dangerous, the more it must be abhorred. Not that the affections are evil things; but, Christ being rejected by this world, everything that binds us to earth must be sacrificed for Him. Cost what it may, He must be followed; and one must know how to hate one's own life, and even to lose it, rather than grow lax in following the Lord. All was lost here in this life of nature. Salvation, the Savior, eternal life, were in question. To take up one's cross, therefore, and follow Him, was the only way to be His disciples. Without this faith, it were better not to begin building; and, being conscious that the enemy is outwardly much stronger than we are, it must be ascertained whether, come what may, we dare, with settled purpose, go out to meet him by faith in Christ. Everything connected with the flesh as such must be broken with.

Moreover (v. 34, 35), they were called to bear a peculiar testimony, to witness to the character of God Himself, as He was rejected in Christ, of which the cross was the true measure. If the disciples were not this, they were nothing worth. They were disciples in this world for no other purpose. Has the church maintained this character? A solemn question for us all!

Having thus unfolded the difference in character between the two dispensations, and the circumstances of the transition from the one to the other, the Lord turns (chap. 15) to higher principles — the sources of the one that was brought in by grace.

It is indeed a contrast between the two, as well as the chapters we have been going through. But this contrast rises to its glorious source in God's own grace, contrasted with the miserable self-righteousness of man.

The publicans and sinners draw near to hear Jesus. Grace had its true dignity to those who needed it. Self-righteousness repulsed that which was not as contemptible as itself, and God Himself at the same time in His nature of love. The Pharisees and the scribes murmured against Him who was a witness of this grace in fulfilling it.

I cannot meditate on this chapter, which has been the joy of so many souls, and the subject of so many testimonies to grace, from the time that the Lord pronounced it, without enlarging upon grace, perfect in its application to the heart. Nevertheless I must confine myself here to great principles, leaving their application to those who preach the word. This is a difficulty that constantly presents itself in this portion of the word.

First, the great principle which the Lord exhibits, and on which He founds the justification of God's dealings (sad state of heart that requires it! marvelous grace and patience that gives it!) the great principle, I repeat, is that God finds His own joy in showing grace. What an answer to the horrid spirit of the Pharisees who made it an objection!

It is the Shepherd who rejoices when the sheep is found, the woman when the piece of money is in her hand, the Father when His child is in His arms. What an expression of that which God is! How truly is Jesus the one to make it known! It is on this that all the blessing of man can alone be founded. It is in this that God is glorified in His grace.

But there are two distinct parts in this grace — the love that seeks, and the love with which one is received. The first two parables describe the former character of this grace. The shepherd seeks his sheep, the woman her piece of money: the sheep and the piece of silver are passive. The shepherd seeks (and the woman also) until he finds, because he has an interest in the matter. The sheep, wearied with its wanderings, has not to take one step in

returning. The shepherd lays it on his shoulders and carries it home. He takes the whole charge, happy to recover his sheep. This is the mind of heaven, whatever the heart of man on earth may be. It is the work of Christ, the Good Shepherd. The woman sets before us the pains which God takes in His love; so that it is more the work of the Spirit, which is represented by that of the woman. The light is brought — she sweeps the house until she finds the piece she had lost. Thus God acts in the world, seeking sinners. The hateful and hating jealousy of self-righteousness finds no place in the mind of heaven, where God dwells, and produces, in the happiness that surrounds Him, the reflex of His own perfections.

But although neither the sheep nor the piece of silver does anything towards its own recovery, there is a real work wrought in the heart of one who is brought back; but this work, necessary as it is for the finding or even the seeking of peace, is not that on which the peace is grounded. The return and the reception of the sinner are therefore described in the third parable. The work of grace, accomplished solely by the power of God, and complete in its effects, is presented to us in the first two. Here the sinner returns, with sentiments which we will now examine — sentiments produced by grace, but which never rise to the height of the grace manifested in his reception until he has returned.

First his estrangement from God is depicted. While as guilty at the moment that he crosses the paternal threshold, in turning his back upon his father, as when he eats husks with the swine, man, deceived by sin, is here presented in the last state of degradation to which sin conducts him. Having expended all that fell to him according to nature, the destitution in which he finds himself (and many a soul feels the famine which it has brought itself into, the emptiness of all around without a desire after God or holiness, and often into what is degrading in sin) does not incline him towards God, but leads him to seek a resource in that which Satan's country (where nothing is given) can supply; and he finds himself among the swine. But grace operates; and the thought of the happiness of his father's house, and of the goodness that blessed all around it, awakes in his heart. Where the Spirit of God works, there are always two things found, conviction in the conscience and the attraction of the heart. It is really the revelation of God to the soul, and God is light and He is love; as light, conviction is produced in the soul, but as love there is the attraction of

goodness, and truthful confession is produced. It is not merely that we have sinned, but that we have to do with God and desire to have, but fear because of what He is, yet are led to go. So the woman in chapter 7.\* So Peter in the boat. This produces the conviction that we are perishing, and a sense, feeble it may be, yet true, of the goodness of God and the happiness to be found in His presence, although we may not feel sure of being received; and we do not remain in the place where we are perishing. There is the sense of sin, there is humiliation; the sense that there is goodness in God; but not the sense of what the grace of God really is. Grace attracts — one goes towards God, but one would be satisfied to be received as a servant — a proof that, though the heart be wrought in by grace, it has not yet met God. Progress, moreover, although real, never gives peace. There is a certain rest of heart in going; but one does not know what reception to expect, after having been guilty of forsaking God. The nearer the prodigal son drew to the house, the more would his heart beat at the thought of meeting his father. But the father anticipates his coming, and acts towards him, not according to his son's deserts, but according to his own heart as a father — the only measure of the ways of God towards us. He is on his son's neck while the latter is still in rags, before he has had time to say, "Make me as one of thy hired servants." It was no longer time to say it. It belonged to a heart anticipating how it would be received, not to one who had met God. Such an one knows how it has been received. The prodigal arranges to say it (as people speak of an humble hope, and a low place); but though the confession is complete when he arrives, he does not then say, Make me a hired servant. How could he? The father's heart had decided his position by its own sentiments, by its love towards him, by the place his heart had given him towards himself. The father's position decided that of the son. This was between himself and his son; but this was not all. He loved his son, even as he was, but he did not introduce him into the house in that condition. The same love that received him as a son will have him enter the house as a son, and as the son of such a father should be. The servants are ordered to bring the best robe and put it on him. Thus loved, and received by love, in our wretchedness, we are clothed with Christ to enter the house. We do not bring the robe: God supplies us with it. It is an entirely new thing; and we become the righteousness of God in Him. This is heaven's best robe. All the rest have part in the joy, except the self righteous man, the true Jew. The joy is the joy of the



father, but all the house shares it. The elder son is not in the house. He is near it, but he will not come in. He will have nothing to do with the grace that makes the poor prodigal the subject of the joy of love. Nevertheless, grace acts; the father goes out and entreats him to come in. It is thus that God acted, in the Gospel, towards the Jew. Yet man's righteousness, which is but selfishness and sin, rejects grace. But God will not give up His grace. It becomes Him. God will be God; and God is love.

[\* See page 240.]

It is this which takes the place of the pretensions of the Jews, who rejected the Lord, and the accomplishment of the promises in Him.

That which gives peace, and characterises our position, is not the sentiments wrought in our hearts, although they indeed exist, but those of God Himself.

In **CHAPTER 16**, the effect of grace on conduct is presented, and the contrast that exists (the dispensation being changed) between the conduct that Christianity requires with regard to the things of the world, and the position of the Jews in that respect. Now this position was only the expression of that of man made evident by the law. The doctrine thus embodied by the parable is confirmed by the parabolic history of the rich man and Lazarus, lifting up the veil that hides the other world in which the result of men's conduct is manifested.

Man is the steward of God (that is, God has committed His goods to man). Israel stands especially in this position.

But man has been unfaithful; Israel had indeed been so. God has taken away his stewardship; but man is still in possession of the goods to administer them, at least, in fact (as Israel was at that moment). These goods are the things of earth — that which man can possess according to the flesh. Having lost his stewardship by his unfaithfulness, and being still in possession of the goods, he uses them to make friends of his master's debtors by doing them good. This is what Christians should do with earthly possessions, using them for others, having the future in view. The steward might have appropriated the money due to his master; he preferred gaining friends with it (that is, he sacrifices present to future advantage). We may turn the miserable riches of this world into means of

fulfilling love. The spirit of grace which fills our hearts (ourselves the objects of grace) exercises itself with regard to temporal things, which we use for others. For us it is in view of the everlasting habitations. "That they may receive you" is equivalent to "that you may be received" — a common form of expression in Luke, to designate the fact without speaking of the individuals that perform it, although using the word they.

Observe that earthly riches are not our own things; heavenly riches, in the case of a true Christian, are his own.

These riches are unrighteous, in that they belong to fallen man, and not to the heavenly man, nor had any place when Adam was innocent.

Now, when the veil is lifted from the other world, the truth is fully brought to light. And the contrast between the Jewish dispensation and the Christian, is clearly unfolded; for Christianity reveals that world, and, as to its principle, belongs to heaven.

Judaism, according to God's government on earth, promised temporal blessing to the righteous; but all was in disorder: even the Messiah, the head of the system, was rejected. In a word, Israel, looked at as set under responsibility, and to enjoy earthly blessing on obedience, had entirely failed. Man, in this world, could no longer, on that footing, be the means of bearing testimony to the ways of God in government. There will be a time of earthly judgment, but it was not yet come. Meanwhile, the possession of riches was anything rather than a proof of God's favor. Personal selfishness, and alas! indifference to a brother in distress at his door, was, instead, the characteristic of its possession among the Jews. Revelation opens the other world to our view. Man, in this world, is fallen, wicked man. If he has received his good things here, he has the portion of sinful man; he will be tormented, while the other one whom he had despised will find happiness in the other world.

It is not a question here of that which gives title to enter heaven, but of character, and of the contrast between the principles of this world and the invisible world. The Jew made choice of this world; he has lost this and the other also. The poor man whom he had thought contemptible is found in Abraham's bosom. The whole tenor of this parable shows its connection with the question of Israel's hopes, and the idea that riches were a proof of

the favor of God (an idea which, false as it may be in every case, is intelligible enough if this world is the scene of blessing under the government of God). The subject of the parable is shown also by that which is found at the end of it. The miserable rich man desires that his brethren might be warned by some one who had risen from the dead. Abraham declares to him the uselessness of this means. It was all over with Israel. God has not again presented His Son to the nation who rejected Him, despising the law and the prophets. The testimony of His resurrection met with the same unbelief that had rejected Him when living, as well as the prophets before Him. There is no consolation in the other world if the testimony of the word to the conscience is rejected in this. The gulf cannot be crossed. A returning Lord would not convince those who had despised the word. All is in connection with the judgment of the Jews, which would close the dispensation; as the preceding parable shows what the conduct of Christians should be with regard to things temporal. All flows from the grace which, in love on God's part, accomplished the salvation of man, and set aside the legal dispensation and its principles by bringing in the heavenly things.

Grace is the spring of the Christian's walk, and furnishes directions for it. He cannot with impunity (chap. 17) despise the weak. He must not be weary of pardoning his brother. If he have faith but as a grain of mustard seed, the power of God is, so to speak, at his disposal. Nevertheless, when he has done all, he has but done his duty (v. 5-10). The Lord then shows (v. 11-37) the deliverance from Judaism, which He still recognised; and, after that, its judgment. He was passing through Samaria and Galilee: ten lepers come towards Him, entreating Him, from a distance, to heal them. He sends them to the priests. This was, in fact, as much as to say, You are clean. It would have been useless to have them pronounced unclean; and they knew it. They take Christ's word, go away with this conviction, and are immediately healed on their way. Nine of them, satisfied with reaping the benefit of His power, pursue their journey to the priests, and remain Jews, not coming out of the old sheepfold. Jesus, indeed, still acknowledged it; but they only acknowledge Him so far as to profit by His presence, and remain where they were. They saw nothing in His Person, nor in the power of God in Him, to attract them. They remain Jews. But this poor stranger — the tenth — recognises the good hand of God. He

falls at the feet of Jesus, giving Him glory. The Lord bids him depart in the liberty of faith” — Go thy way; thy faith hath saved thee.” He has no longer need to go to the priests. He had found God and the source of blessing in Christ, and goes away freed from the yoke which was soon to be judicially broken for all.

For the kingdom of God was among them. To those who could discern it, the King was there in their midst. The kingdom did not come in such a manner as to attract the attention of the world. It was there, so that the disciples would soon desire to see one of those days which they had enjoyed during the time of the Lord’s presence on earth, but would not see it. He then announces the pretensions of false Christs, the true having been rejected, so that the people would be left a prey to the wiles of the enemy. His disciples were not to follow them. In connection with Jerusalem they would be exposed to these temptations, but they had the Lord’s directions for guidance through them.

Now the Son of man, in His day, would be like the lightning: but, before that, He must suffer many things from the unbelieving Jews. The day would be like that of Lot, and that of Noe: men would be at ease, following their carnal occupations, like the world overtaken by the flood, and Sodom by the fire from heaven. It will be the revelation of the Son of man — His public revelation — sudden and vivid. This referred to Jerusalem. Being thus warned, their concern was to escape the judgment of the Son of man which, at the time of His coming, would fall upon the city that had rejected Him; for this Son of man, whom they had disowned, would come again in His glory. There must be no looking back; that would be to have the heart in the place of judgment. Better lose all, life itself, rather than be associated with that which was going to be judged. If they should escape and have their lives spared through unfaithfulness, the judgment was the judgment of God; He would know how to reach them in their bed, and to distinguish between two that were in one bed, and between two women who ground the corn of the household at the same mill.

This character of the judgment shows that it is not the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus that is meant. It was the judgment of God that could discern, take away, and spare. Neither is it the judgment of the dead, but a judgment on earth: they are in bed, they are at the mill, they are on the

housetops and in the fields. Warned by the Lord, they were to forsake all, and to care only for Him who came to judge. If they asked where this should be — wherever the dead body lay, there would be the judgment that would come down like a vulture, which they could not see, but from which the prey would not escape.

But, in the presence of all the power of their enemies and oppressors (for there would be such, as we have seen, so that they might even lose their lives), there was a resource for the afflicted remnant. They were (chap. 18) to persevere in prayer, the resource, moreover, at all times, of the faithful — of man, if he understand it. God would avenge His elect, although, as to the exercise of their faith, He would, indeed, try it. But when He came, would the Son of man find this faith that waited for His intervention? That was the solemn question, the answer to which is left to the responsibility of man a question which implies that it could hardly be expected, although it ought to exist. Nevertheless, should there be any faith acceptable to Him who seeks it, it will not be disappointed or confounded.

It will be observed, that the kingdom (and that is the subject) is presented in two ways among the Jews at that time — in the Person of Jesus then present (chap. 17:21), and in the execution of the judgment, in which the elect ones should be spared, and the vengeance of God be executed in their behalf. On this account, they were only to think of pleasing Him, however oppressive and at ease the world might be. It is the day of the judgment of the wicked, and not that in which the righteous will be caught up to heaven. Enoch and Abraham are more the types of the latter; Noe and Lot, of those who will be spared to live on the earth; only there are oppressors of whom the remnant are to be avenged. Verse 31 shows that they must think only of the judgment and connect themselves with nothing as men. Detached from everything, their only hope would be in God at such a moment.

The Lord then resumes, in verse 9 of chapter 18, the description of those characters which were suitable to the kingdom, to enter it now by following Him. From verse 35\* the great transition draws near historically.

[\* The case of the blind man at Jericho is, as already noted, the beginning (in all the synoptical Gospels) of the last events of Christ's life.]

Verse 8, then, of chapter 18, ends the prophetic warning with respect to the last days. The Lord afterwards resumes the consideration of the characters which befit the state of things introduced by grace.

Self-righteousness is far from being a recommendation for entrance into the kingdom. The most miserable sinner, confessing his sin, is justified before God rather than the self-righteous. He that exalts himself shall be abased, and he that humbles himself shall be exalted. What a pattern and witness of this truth was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself!

The spirit of a little child — simple, believing all that he is told, confiding, of little importance in his own eyes, who must give way to all — this was meet for the kingdom of God. What else would He admit?

Again, the principles of the kingdom, as established by the rejection of Christ, were in full contrast with the temporal blessings attached to obedience to the law, excellent as that law was in its place. Goodness in man there was none: God only is good. The young man who had fulfilled the law in his outward walk is called to leave everything that he may follow the Lord. Jesus knew his circumstances and his heart, and put His finger on the covetousness that ruled him and was fed by the riches he possessed. He was to sell all that he had and follow Jesus; he should have treasure in heaven. The young man went away sorrowful. The riches that, in the eyes of men, appeared to be a sign of God's favor, were but a hindrance when the heart and heaven came in question. The Lord announces at the same time, that whosoever should forsake anything that he prized for the sake of the kingdom of heaven should receive much more in this world, and, in the next, life everlasting. We may remark that it is only the principle which is here laid down in reference to the kingdom.

At last the Lord, on His way to Jerusalem, plainly tells His disciples in private that He was going to be delivered up, to be ill-treated and put to death, and then to rise again. It was the fulfillment of all that the prophets had written. But the disciples understood none of those things.

If the Lord was to make those who followed Him take up the cross, He could not but bear it Himself. He went before His sheep, in this path of self-denial and devotedness, to prepare the way. He went alone. It was a path which His people had not yet trodden, nor indeed could they till after He had done so.

The history of His last approach to Jerusalem and intercourse with it now commences (v. 35). Here then He presents Himself anew as the Son of David, and for the last time; laying on the conscience of the nation His pretensions to that title, while displaying the consequences of His rejection. Near Jericho,\* the place of malediction, He gives sight to a blind man who believes in His title of Son of David. So indeed those who possessed that faith did receive their sight to follow Him, and they saw yet greater things than these. In Jericho (chap. 19) He sets forth grace, in spite of the pharisaic spirit. Nevertheless it is as a son of Abraham that He points out Zacchaeus, who — in a false position indeed as such — had a tender conscience and a generous heart\*\* by grace. His position did not, in the eyes of Jesus, take from him the character of son of Abraham (if it had that effect, who could have been blessed?) and did not bar the way to that salvation which was come to save the lost. It entered with Jesus into the house of this son of Abraham. He brought salvation, whoever might be heir to it.

[\* In Luke the coming to Jericho is stated as a general fact, in contrast with His general journey which is in view from chapter 9:51. In point of fact it was on going out of Jericho He saw the blind man. The general fact is all we have here, to give the whole history, Zacchaeus and all, Its moral place.]

[\*\* I doubt not that Zacchaeus sets before Jesus that which he did habitually, before the Lord came to him. Nevertheless salvation came that day to his house.]

Nevertheless He does not conceal from them His departure, and the character which the kingdom would assume, owing to His absence. As for them, Jerusalem, and the expectation of the coming kingdom, filled their minds. The Lord therefore explains to them what would take place. He goes away to receive a kingdom and to return. Meanwhile He commits some of His goods (the gifts of the Spirit) to His servants to trade with during His absence. The difference between this parable and that in the Gospel by Matthew is this: Matthew presents the sovereignty and the wisdom of the giver, who varies His gifts according to the aptitude of His servants; in Luke it is more particularly the responsibility of the servants, who each receive the same sum, and the one gains by it, in his master's interest, more than the other. Accordingly it is not said, as in Matthew, "Enter into the joy of your Lord," the same thing to all, and the more excellent thing; but to the one it is authority over ten cities that is given; to

the other, over five (that is to say, a share in the kingdom according to their labor). The servant does not lose that which he has gained, although it was for his master. He enjoys it. Not so with the servant who made no use of his talent; that which had been committed to him is given to the one who had gained ten.

That which we gain spiritually here, in spiritual intelligence and in the knowledge of God in power, is not lost in the other world. On the contrary we receive more, and the glory of the inheritance is given us in proportion to our work. All is grace.

But there was yet another element in the history of the kingdom. The citizens (the Jews) not only reject the king, but, when he is gone away to receive the kingdom, send a messenger after him to say that they will not have him to reign over them. Thus the Jews, when Peter sets their sin before them, and declares to them that if they repent, Jesus would return, and with Him the times of refreshing, reject the testimony, and, so to say, send Stephen after Jesus to testify that they would have nothing to do with Him. When He returns in glory, the perverse nation is judged before His eyes. The avowed enemies of Christ, they receive the reward of their rebellion.

He had declared that which the kingdom was — that which it should be. He now comes to present it for the last time in His own Person to the inhabitants of Jerusalem according to the prophecy of Zechariah. This remarkable scene has been considered in its general aspect when studying Matthew and Mark; but some particular circumstances require notice here. All is gathered round His entrance. The disciples and the Pharisees are in contrast. Jerusalem is in the day of her visitation, and she knows it not.

Some remarkable expressions are uttered by His disciples, moved by the Spirit of God, on this occasion. Had they been silent, the stones would have broken out in proclamation of the glory of the rejected One. The kingdom, in their triumphant acclamations, is not simply the kingdom in its earthly aspect. In Matthew it was, "Hosanna to the Son of David," and "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest." That was indeed true; but here we have something more. The Son of David disappears. He is indeed the King, who comes in the name of the Lord; but it is no longer the remnant of Israel who seek salvation in the



name of the Son of David, acknowledging His title. It is “peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” The kingdom depends on peace being established in the heavenly places. The Son of man, exalted on high, and victorious over Satan, has reconciled the heavens. The glory of grace in His Person is established for the everlasting and supreme glory of the God of love. The kingdom on earth is but a consequence of this glory which grace has established. The power that cast out Satan has established peace in heaven. At the beginning, in Luke 2:14, we have, in the manifested grace, Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth; the good pleasure of God] in men. To establish the kingdom, peace is made in heaven; the glory of God is fully established in the highest.

It will be remarked here that, as He draws nigh to Jerusalem, the Lord weeps over the city. It is not now as in Matthew, where, while discoursing with the Jews, He points it out to them as that which having rejected and slain the prophets — Emmanuel also, the Lord, who would so often have gathered her children under His wings, having been ignominiously rejected — was now given up to desolation until His return. It is the hour of her visitation, and she has not known it. If only she had, even now, hearkened to the call of the testimony of her God! She is given up into the hands of the Gentiles, her enemies, who will not leave her one stone upon another. That is to say, not having known this visitation of God in grace in the Person of Jesus, she is set aside — the testimony goes no farther — she gives place to a new order of things. Thus the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus is here prominent. It is the moral character of the temple also of which the Lord here speaks. The Spirit does not notice here that it is to be the temple of God for all nations. It is simply (chap. 20:16) the vineyard is given to others. They fell upon the stone of stumbling then: when it falls on them — when Jesus comes in judgment — it will grind them to powder.

In His reply to the Sadducees, three important things are added to that which is said in Matthew. 1st, It is not only the condition of those who are raised, and the certainty of the resurrection; it is an age, which a certain class only, who are accounted worthy of it, shall obtain, a separate resurrection of the just (v. 35). 2nd, This class is composed of the children of God, as being the children of the resurrection (v. 36). 3rd While waiting for this resurrection, their souls survive death, all live unto God, although they may be hidden from the eyes of men (v. 38).

The parable of the wedding feast is omitted here. In chapter 14 of this Gospel we find it with characteristic elements, a mission to the lanes of the city, to the despised of the nations, which is not in Matthew, who gives us the judgment of Jerusalem instead, before announcing the evangelisation of the Gentiles. All this is characteristic. In Luke it is grace, a moral condition of man before God, and the new order of things founded on the rejection of Christ. I will not dwell upon those points which Luke relates in common with Matthew. They naturally meet in the great facts that relate to the Lord's rejection by the Jews, and its consequences.

If we compare Matthew 23 and Luke 20:45-47, we shall see at once the difference. In Luke the Spirit gives us in three verses that which morally puts the scribes aside. In Matthew their whole position with respect to the dispensation is developed; whether as having a place, so long as Moses continued, or with reference to their guiltiness before God in that place.

The Lord's discourse in chapter 21 displays the character of the Gospel in a peculiar manner. The spirit of grace, in contrast with the Judaic spirit, is seen in the account of the poor widow's offering. But the Lord's prophecy requires more detailed notice. Verse 6, as we saw at the end of chapter 19, speaks only of the destruction of Jerusalem as she then stood. This is true also of the disciples' question. They say nothing of the end of the age. The Lord afterwards enters upon the duties and the circumstances of His disciples previous to that hour. In verse 8 it is said, "The time draweth near," which is not found in Matthew. He goes much more into detail with regard to their ministry during that period, encourages them, promises them necessary help. Persecution should turn to them for a testimony. From the middle of verse 11 to the end of verse 19 we have details relative to His disciples, that are not found in the corresponding passage of Matthew. They present the general state of things in the same sense, adding the condition of the Jews, of those especially who, more or less, professedly received the word. The whole stream of testimony, as rendered in connection with Israel, but extending to the nations, is found in Matthew to the end of verse 14. In Luke it is the coming service of the disciples, until the moment when the judgment of God should put an end to that which was virtually terminated by the rejection of Christ. Consequently the Lord says nothing in verse 20 of the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel, but gives the fact of the siege of

Jerusalem, and its then approaching desolation — not the end of the age, as in Matthew. These were the days of vengeance on the Jews, who had crowned their rebellion by rejecting the Lord. Therefore Jerusalem should be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled, that is, the times destined to the sovereignty of the Gentile empires according to the counsel of God revealed in the prophecies of Daniel. This is the period in which we now live. There is a break here in the discourse. Its principal subject is ended; but there are still some events of the last scene to be revealed, which close the history of this Gentile supremacy.

We shall see also that, although it is the commencement of the judgment, from which Jerusalem will not arise until all is accomplished and the song of Isaiah 40 is addressed to her, nevertheless, the great tribulation is not mentioned here. There is great distress, and wrath upon the people, as was indeed the case in the siege of Jerusalem by Titus; and the Jews were also led away captive. Neither is it said, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days.” Nevertheless, without designating the epoch, but after having spoken of the times of the Gentiles, the end of the age comes. There are signs in heaven, distress on earth, a mighty movement in the waves of human population. The heart of man, moved by a prophetic alarm, foresees the calamities which, still unknown, are threatening him; for all the influences that govern men are shaken. Then shall they see the Son of man, once rejected from the earth, coming from heaven with the ensigns of Jehovah, with power and great glory — the Son of man, of whom this Gospel has always spoken. There the prophecy ends. We have not here the gathering together of the elect Israelites, who had been dispersed, of which Matthew speaks.

That which follows consists of exhortations, in order that the day of distress may be a token of deliverance to the faith of those who, trusting in the Lord, obey the voice of His servant. The “generation” (a word already explained when considering Matthew) should not pass away till all was fulfilled. The length of the time that has elapsed since then, and that must elapse until the end, is left in darkness. Heavenly things are not measured by dates. Moreover that moment is hidden in the knowledge of the Father. Still heaven and earth should pass away, but not the words of Jesus. He then tells them that, as dwelling on earth, they must be watchful, lest their

own hearts should be overcharged with things that would sink them into this world, in the midst of which they were to be witnesses. For that day would come as a snare upon all those who had their dwelling here, who were rooted here. They were to watch and pray, in order to escape all those things, and to stand in the presence of the Son of man. This is still the great subject of our Gospel. To be with Him, as those who have escaped from the earth, to be among the 144,000 on Mount Zion, will be an accomplishment of this blessing, but the place is not named; so that, supposing the faithfulness of those whom He was personally addressing, the hope awakened by His words would be fulfilled in a more excellent manner in His heavenly presence in the day of glory.

In **CHAPTER 22** commence the details of the end of our Lord's life. The chief priests, fearing the people, seek how they may kill Him. Judas, under the influence of Satan, offers himself as an instrument, that they might take Him in the absence of the multitude. The day of Passover comes, and the Lord pursues that which belonged to His work of love in these immediate circumstances. I will notice the points that appertain to the character of this Gospel, the change that took place in immediate and direct connection with the Lord's death. Thus He desired to eat this last Passover with His disciples, because He would eat thereof no more until it was fulfilled in the kingdom of God, that is, by His death. He drinks wine no more until the kingdom of God shall come. He does not say, until He shall drink it new in the kingdom of His Father, but only that He will not drink it till the kingdom shall come: just as the times of the Gentiles are in view as a present thing, so here Christianity, the kingdom as it is now, not the millennium. Observe also what a touching expression of love we have here: His heart needed this last testimony of affection before leaving them.

The new covenant is founded on the blood here drunk in figure. The old was done away. Blood was required to establish the new. At the same time the covenant itself was not established; but everything was done on God's part. The blood was not shed to give force to a covenant of judgment like the first; it was shed for those who received Jesus, while waiting for the time when the covenant itself should be established with Israel in grace.

The disciples, believing the words of Christ, do not themselves know, and they ask one another, which of them it could be that should betray Him, a

striking expression of faith in all he uttered — for none, save Judas, had a bad conscience — and marked their innocence. And at the same time, thinking of the kingdom in a carnal way, they dispute for the first place in it; and this, in the presence of the cross, at the table where the Lord was giving them the last pledges of His love. Truth of heart there was, but what a heart to have truth in! As for Himself, He had taken the lowest place, and that — as the most excellent for love — was His alone. They had to follow Him as closely as they could. His grace recognises their having done so, as if He were their debtor for their care during His time of sorrow on earth. He remembered it. In the day of His kingdom they should have twelve thrones, as heads of Israel, among whom they had followed Him.

But now it was a question of passing through death; and, having followed Him thus far, what an opportunity for the enemy to sift them since they could no longer follow Him as men living on the earth! All that belonged to a living Messiah was completely overthrown, and death was there. Who could pass through it? Satan would profit by this, and desired to have them that he might sift them. Jesus does not seek to spare His disciples this sifting. It was not possible, for He must pass through death, and their hope was in Him. They cannot escape it: the flesh must be put to the test of death. But He prays for them, that the faith of the one, whom He especially names, may not fail. Simon, ardent in the flesh, was exposed more than all to the danger into which a false confidence in the flesh might lead him, but in which it could not sustain him. Being however the object of this grace on the Lord's part, his fall would be the means of his strength. Knowing what the flesh was, and also the perfection of grace; he would be able to strengthen his brethren. Peter asserts that he could do anything — the very things he should entirely fail in. The Lord briefly warns him of what he would really do.

Jesus then takes occasion to forewarn them that all was about to change. During His presence here below, the true Messiah, Emmanuel, He had sheltered them from all difficulties; when He sent them throughout Israel, they had lacked nothing. But now (for the kingdom was not yet coming in power) they would be, like Himself, exposed to contempt and violence. Humanly speaking, they would have to take care of themselves. Peter, ever forward, taking the words of Christ literally, was permitted to lay bare his thoughts by exhibiting two swords. The Lord stops him by a word that

showed him it was of no use to go farther. They were not capable of it at that time. As to Himself, He pursues with perfect tranquillity His daily habits.

Pressed in spirit by that which was coming, He exhorts His disciples to pray, that they enter not into temptation; that is to say, that when the time came that they should be put to the test, walking with God, it should be for them obedience to God, and not a means of departure from Him. There are such moments, if God permits them to come, in which everything is put to the proof by the enemy's power.

The Lord's dependence as man is then displayed in the most striking manner. The whole scene of Gethsemane and the cross, in Luke, is the perfect dependent man. He prays: He submits to His Father's will. An angel strengthens Him: this was their service to the Son of man.\* Afterwards, in deep conflict, He prays more earnestly: dependent man, He is perfect in His dependence. The deepness of the conflict deepens His intercourse with His Father. The disciples were overwhelmed by the shadow only of that which caused Jesus to pray. They take refuge in the forgetfulness of sleep. The Lord, with the patience of grace, repeats His warning, and the multitude arrive. Peter, confident when warned, sleeping at the approach of temptation when the Lord was praying, strikes when Jesus allows Himself to be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and then alas! denies when Jesus confesses the truth. But, submissive as the Lord was to His Father's will, He plainly shows that His power had not departed from Him. He heals the wound that Peter inflicted on the high priest's servant, and then permits Himself to be led away, with the remark that it was their hour and the power of darkness. Sad and terrible association!

[\* There are elements of the profoundest interest which appear in comparing this Gospel with others in this place; and elements which bring out the character of this Gospel in the most striking way. In Gethsemane we have the Lord's conflict brought out more fully in Luke than anywhere; but on the cross we have His superiority to the sufferings He was in. There is no expression of them: He is above them. It is not, as in John, the divine side of the picture. There in Gethsemane we have no agony, but when He names Himself, they go backward and fall to the ground. On the cross, no "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" but He delivers up His own spirit to God. This is not so in Luke. In Gethsemane we have the Man of sorrows, a man feeling in all its depths what was before Him, and looking to His Father. "Being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly." On the cross we have One who as man has bowed to His Father's will, and is in the

calmness of One who, in whatever sorrow and suffering, is above it all. He tells the weeping women to weep for themselves, not for Him, the green tree, for judgment was coming. He prays for those who were crucifying Him; He speaks peace and heavenly joy to the poor thief who was converted; He was going into Paradise before the kingdom came. The same is seen specially in the fact of His death. It is not, as in John, He gave up His spirit; but, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." He trusts His spirit in death, as a man who knows and believes in God His Father, to Him whom He thus knew. In Matthew we have the forsaking of God and His sense of it. This character of the Gospel, revealing Christ distinctively as perfect Man, and the perfect Man, is full of the deepest interest. He passed through His sorrows with God, and then in perfect peacefulness was above them all; His trust in His Father perfect, even in death — a path not trodden by man hitherto, and never to be trodden by the saints. If Jordan overflowed all its banks at the time of harvest, the ark in the depths of it made it a passage dryshod into the inheritance of God's people.]

In all this scene we behold the complete dependence of the man, the power of death felt as a trial in all its force; but, apart from that which was going on in His soul and before His Father, in which we see the reality of these two things, there was the most perfect tranquillity, the most gentle calmness towards men\* grace that never belies itself. Thus, when Peter denied Him as He had foretold, He looks upon him at the fitting moment. All the parade of His iniquitous trial does not distract His thoughts, and Peter is broken down by that look. When questioned, He has little to say. His hour was come Subject to His Father's will, He accepted the cup from His hand. His judges did but accomplish that will, and bring Him the cup. He makes no answer to the question whether He is the Christ. It was no longer the time to do so. They would not believe it — would not answer Him if He had put questions to them that would have brought out the truth; neither would they have let Him go. But He bears the plainest testimony to the place which, from that hour, the Son of man took. This we have repeatedly seen in reading this Gospel. He would sit on the right hand of the power of God. We see also it is the place He takes at present.\*\* They immediately draw the right conclusion — "Thou art, then, the Son of God?" He bears testimony to this truth, and all is ended; that is to say, He waives the question, whether He was the Messiah — that was gone by for Israel — He was going to suffer; He is the Son of man, but thenceforth only as entering into glory; and He is the Son of God. It was all over with Israel as to their responsibility; the heavenly glory of the Son of man, the personal glory of the Son of God was about to shine

forth; and Jesus (chap. 23) is led away to the Gentiles, that all may be accomplished.

[\* It is most striking to see how Christ met, according to divine perfectness, every circumstance He was in. They only drew out the perfectness. He felt them all, was governed by none, but met them always Himself. This which was always true was wonderfully shown here. He prays with the fullest sense of what was coming upon Him — the cup He had to drink — turns and warns them, and gently rebukes and excuses Peter, as if walking in Galilee, the flesh was weak; and then returns into yet deeper agony with His Father. Grace suited Him with Peter, agony in the presence of God; and He was grace with Peter — in agony at the thought of the cup.]

[\*\* The word “hereafter,” in the Authorised Version, should be “henceforth.” That is, from this hour they would see Him no longer in humiliation, but as Son of man in power.]

The Gentiles, however, are not presented in this Gospel as being voluntarily guilty. We see, no doubt, an indifference which is flagrant injustice in a case like this, and an insolence which nothing could excuse; but Pilate does what he can to deliver Christ, and Herod, disappointed, sends Him back unjudged. The will is altogether on the side of the Jews. That is the characteristic of this part of the history in Luke’s Gospel. Pilate would rather not have burdened himself with this useless crime, and he despised the Jews; but they were resolved on the crucifixion of Jesus, and require Barabbas to be released — a seditious man and a murderer (see v. 20-25).\*

[\* This willful guilt of the Jews is strongly brought out in John’s Gospel also, that is, their national guilt. Pilate treats them with contempt; and there it is they say, “We have no king but Caesar.”

Jesus, therefore, as He was led to Calvary, announced to the women, who with natural feeling lamented for Him, that it was all over with Jerusalem, that they had to bewail their own fate and not His; for days were coming upon Jerusalem which would make them call those happy who had never been mothers — days in which they would in vain seek refuge from terror and judgment. For if in Him, the true green tree, these things were done, what would become of the dry tree of Judaism without God? Nevertheless, at the moment of His crucifixion, the Lord intercedes for the unhappy people: they knew not what they did — intercession, to which Peter’s discourse to the Jews (Acts 3) is the remarkable answer by the Holy Ghost come down from heaven. The rulers among the Jews,



completely blinded, as well as the people, taunt Him with being unable to save Himself from the cross — not knowing that it was impossible if He was a Savior, and that all was taken from them, and that God was establishing another order of things, founded on atonement, in the power of eternal life by the resurrection. Dreadful blindness, of which the poor soldiers were but imitators, according to the malignity of human nature! But the judgment of Israel was in their mouth, and (on God's part) upon the cross. It was the King of the Jews who hung there — abased indeed, for a thief hung by His side could rail on Him — but in the place to which love had brought Him for the everlasting and present salvation of souls. This was manifested at the very moment. The insults that reproached Him for not saving Himself from the cross, had His answer in the fate of the converted thief, who rejoined Him the same day in Paradise.

This history is a striking demonstration of the change to which this Gospel leads us. The King of the Jews, by their own confession, is not delivered — He is crucified. What an end to the hopes of this people! But at the same time a gross sinner, converted by grace on the very gibbet, goes straight to Paradise. A soul is eternally saved. It is not the kingdom, but a soul — out of the body — in happiness with Christ. And remark here how the presentation of Christ brings out the wickedness of the human heart. No thief would mock at or reproach another thief on the gibbet. But the moment it is Christ who is there, this takes place.

But I would say a few words on the condition of the other thief, and on the reply of Christ. We see every mark of conversion, and of the most remarkable faith. The fear of God, the beginning of wisdom, is there; conscience upright and vigorous. It is not “and justly” to his fellow, but “we indeed justly”; knowledge of the perfect sinless righteousness of Christ as man; the acknowledgment of Him as the Lord, when His own disciples had forsaken and denied Him, and when there was no sign of His glory or of the dignity of His Person. He was accounted by man as one like himself. His kingdom was but a subject of scorn to all. But the poor thief is taught of God; and all is plain. He is as sure that Christ will have the kingdom as if He was reigning in glory. All his desire is that Christ should remember him then; and what confidence in Christ is here shown through the knowledge of Him in spite of his acknowledged guilt! It shows how Christ filled his heart, and how his confiding in grace by its brightness shut

out human shame, for who would like to be remembered in the shame of a gibbet! Divine teaching is singularly manifested here. Do not we know by divine teaching that Christ was sinless, and to be assured of His kingdom there was a faith above all circumstances? He alone is a comfort to Jesus upon the cross, and makes Him think (in answering his faith) of the Paradise that awaited Him when He should have finished the work that His Father had given Him to do. Observe the state of sanctification this poor man was in by faith. In all the agonies of the cross, and while believing Jesus to be the Lord, he seeks no relief at His hands, but asks that He will remember him in His kingdom. He is filled with one thought — to have his portion with Jesus. He believes that the Lord will return; he believes in the kingdom, while the King is rejected and crucified, and when, as to man, there was no longer any hope. But the reply of Jesus goes farther in the revelation of that proper to this Gospel, and adds that which brings in, not the kingdom, but everlasting life, the happiness of the soul. The thief had asked Jesus to remember him when He returned in His kingdom. The Lord replies that he should not wait for that day of manifested glory which would be visible to the world, but that this very day he should be with Him in Paradise. Precious testimony, and perfect grace! Jesus crucified was more than King — He was Savior. The poor malefactor was a testimony to it, and the joy and consolation of the Lord's heart — the first-fruits of the love which had placed them side by side, where, if the poor thief bore the fruit of his sins from man, the Lord of glory at his side was bearing the fruit of them from God, treated as Himself a malefactor in the same condemnation. Through a work unknown to man save by faith the sins of His companion were for ever put away, they no longer existed, their remembrance was only that of the grace which had taken them away, and which had for ever cleansed his soul from them, making him that moment as fit to enter Paradise as Christ Himself his companion there!

The Lord then, having fulfilled all things, and still full of strength, commends His spirit to His Father. He commits it to Him, the last act of that which composed His whole life — the perfect energy of the Holy Ghost acting in a perfect confidence in His Father, and dependence upon Him. He commits His spirit to His Father, and expires. For it was death that He had before Him — but death in absolute faith which trusted in His

Father — death with God by faith; and not the death that separated from God. Meantime nature veiled itself — acknowledged the departure from this world of Him who had created it. All is darkness. But on the other hand God reveals Himself — the veil of the temple is rent in twain from the top to the bottom. God had hidden Himself in thick darkness — the way into the holiest had not yet been manifested. But now there is no longer a veil; that which has put sin away through perfect love now shines forth, while the holiness of God's presence is joy to the heart, and not torment. What brings us into the presence of perfect holiness without a veil, put away the sin which forbade us to be there. Our communion is with Him through Christ, holy and unblameable before Him in love.

The poor centurion, struck with all that had taken place, confesses — such is the power of the cross upon the conscience — that this Jesus whom he has crucified was certainly the righteous man. I say conscience, because I do not pretend to say that it went any farther than that in the case of the centurion. We see the same effect on the spectators: they went away smiting their breasts. They perceived that something solemn had happened — that they had fatally compromised themselves with God.

But the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, had prepared everything for the burial of His Son, who had glorified Him by giving Himself up to death. He is with the rich in His death. Joseph, a just man, who had not consented to the sin of his people, lays the Lord's body in a tomb that had never yet been used. It was the preparation before the sabbath; but the sabbath was near. At the time of His death the women — faithful (though ignorant) to their affection for Him while living — see where the body is laid, and go to prepare all that was needed for its embalming. Luke only speaks in general terms of these women: we shall therefore enter on the details elsewhere, following our Gospel as it presents itself. The women (chap. 24) come, find the stone rolled away, and the sepulchre no longer containing the body of Him whom they had loved. While perplexed at this, they see two angels near them, who ask why they came to seek the living among the dead, and remind them of the plain words which Jesus had spoken to them in Galilee. They go and tell these things to all the disciples, who cannot believe their account; but Peter runs to the sepulchre, sees everything in order, and departs, wondering at that which had come to pass. In all this there was no faith in the words of

Jesus, nor in that which the scriptures had spoken. In the journey to Emmaus the Lord connects the scriptures with all that happened to Himself, showing to their minds still lingering round the thought of an earthly kingdom, that according to these scriptures God's revealed counsels, the Christ ought to suffer and enter into His glory, a rejected and heavenly Christ. He awakens that ardent attention which the heart feels whenever it is touched. He then reveals Himself in breaking bread — the sign of His death: not that this was the Eucharist, but this particular act was linked with that event. Then their eyes were opened, and He disappears. It was the true Jesus; but in resurrection. Here He Himself explained all that the scriptures had spoken, and presented Himself in life with the symbol of His death. The two disciples return to Jerusalem.

The Lord had already shown Himself to Simon — an appearance, of which we have no details. Paul also mentions it as the first with reference to the apostles. While the two disciples related that which had happened to them, Jesus Himself stood in their midst. But their minds were not yet formed to this truth, and His presence alarms them. They cannot realise the idea of the resurrection of the body. The Lord uses their confusion (very natural, humanly speaking) for our blessing, by giving them the most sensible proofs that it was Himself risen; but Himself, body and soul, the same as before His death. He bids them touch Him, and He eats before their eyes.\* It was indeed Himself.

[\* Nothing can be more touching than the way in which He cultivates their confidence as that One they had known, the man, still a true man (though with a spiritual body) as He had been before! Handle me and see that it is I myself. Blessed be God, for ever a man, the same who has been known in living love in the midst of our weakness.]

An important thing remained — the basis of true faith: the words of Christ, and the testimony of scripture. This He sets before them. But two things were yet required. First, they needed capacity to understand the word. He opens their understanding therefore, that they might understand the scriptures, and establishes them as witnesses that were not only able to say, "Thus it is, for we have seen it"; but "Thus it must needs have been, for so hath God said in his word"; and the testimony of Christ Himself was fulfilled in His resurrection.

But now grace was to be preached — Jesus rejected by the Jews, slain and risen again for the salvation of souls, having made peace, and bestowing life according to the power of resurrection, the work which cleansed from sin being accomplished, and pardon already granted in thus bestowing it. Grace was to be preached among all nations, that is to say, repentance and pardon to sinners; beginning at that place, with which indeed the patient grace of God still owned a link, through the intercession of Jesus, but which could only be reached by sovereign grace, and in which sin the most aggravated rendered pardon the most necessary, by a testimony which, coming from heaven, must deal with Jerusalem as it dealt with all. They were to preach repentance and remission of sins to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. The Jew, a child of wrath, even as others, must come in on the same ground. The testimony had a higher source, although it was said “to the Jew first.”

But, secondly, something more therefore was needed for the accomplishment of this mission, that is, power. They were to tarry at Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high. Jesus would send the Holy Ghost whom He had promised, of whom the prophets also had spoken.

While blessing His disciples, heaven and heavenly grace characterising His relationship with them, Jesus was parted from them, and carried up into heaven; and they returned to Jerusalem with joy.

It will have been remarked that the narrative of Luke is very general here, and contains the great principles on which the doctrines and proofs of the resurrection are founded; the unbelief of the natural heart so graphically painted in the most simple and touching accounts; the disciples' attachment to their own hopes of the kingdom, and the difficulty with which the doctrine of the word took possession of their hearts, although, in proportion to their realisation, their hearts opened to it with joy; the Person of Jesus risen, still a man, the gracious One they knew; the doctrine of the word; the understanding of the word bestowed; the power of the Holy Ghost given — all that belonged to the truth and to the eternal order of things made manifest. Nevertheless, Jerusalem was still recognised as the first object of grace on earth according to God's dispensations towards her; yet she was not, even as a place, the point of contact and connection

between Jesus and His disciples. He does not bless them from Jerusalem, although, in the dealings of God with the earth, they were to tarry there for the gift of the Holy Ghost; for themselves and their relationship with Him He leads them out to Bethany. From thence He had set out to present Himself as King to Jerusalem. It was there that the resurrection of Lazarus took place; there that the family, which present the character of the remnant — attached to His Person, now rejected, with better hopes — in the most striking manner received Jesus. It was thither He retired when His testimony to the Jews was ended, that His heart might rest for a few moments among those whom He loved, who, through grace, loved Him. It was there that He established the link (as to circumstances) between the remnant attached to His Person and heaven. From thence He ascends.

Jerusalem is but the public starting-point of their ministry, as it had been the last scene of His witness. For themselves it was Bethany and heaven which were connected in the Person of Jesus. From thence was the testimony to come for Jerusalem herself. This is the more striking when we compare it with Matthew. There He goes to Galilee, the place of association with the Jewish remnant, and there is no ascension, and the mission is exclusively to the nations. It is a carrying out to them, what was then confined to the Jews and forbidden to be carried further.

NOTE. In the text I have strictly followed the passage; I add some developments here, connecting this Gospel with the others.

There are two distinct parts in the sufferings of Christ: 1st, that which He suffered from the efforts of Satan — as man in conflict with the power of the enemy who has dominion over death, but with the sense of what it was from God in view, and this in communion with His Father, presenting His requests to Him; and 2ndly, that which He suffered to accomplish expiation for sin, when actually bearing our sins, made sin for us, drinking the cup which the will of His Father had given Him to drink.

When speaking on the Gospel of John, I shall enter more on the character of the temptations; but I would notice here, that at the commencement of His public life the tempter endeavored to turn Jesus aside by setting before Him the attractiveness of all that which, as privilege, belonged to Him, all that might be agreeable to Christ as man, as to which His own will might work. He was defeated by the perfect obedience of Christ. He would have

Christ, being Son, go out of the place He had taken as servant. Blessed be God he failed. Christ by simple obedience bound the strong man as to this life, and then returning in the power of the Spirit into Galilee spoiled his goods. Putting away sin and bearing our sins was another matter. Satan then departed from Him for a season. In Gethsemane he returns, using the fear of death to throw anguish into the heart of the Lord. And He must needs go through death; and death was not only Satan's power but God's judgment on man, if man was to be delivered from it, for it was man's portion; and He alone, by going down into it, could break its chains. He had become man, that man might be delivered and even glorified. The distress of His soul was complete. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Thus His soul was that which the soul of a man ought to be in the presence of death, when Satan puts forth all his power in it, with the cup of God's judgment as yet unemptied in it: only He was perfect in it; it was a part of His perfection put to the test in all that was possible to man. But with tears and supplications He makes His request to Him who had power to save Him from death. For the moment, His agony increases: presenting it to God makes it more acute. This is the case in our own little conflicts. But thus the thing is settled according to perfection before God. His soul enters into it with God; He prays more fervently. It is now evident that this cup — which He puts before His Father's eyes when Satan presents it to Him as the power of death in His soul — must be drunk. As obedience to His Father, He takes it in peace. To drink it is but perfect obedience, instead of being the power of Satan. But it must be drunk in reality; and upon the cross Jesus, the Savior of our souls, enters into the second phase of His sufferings. He goes under death as the judgment of God, the separation of the soul from the light of His countenance. All that a soul which enjoyed nothing except communion with God could suffer in being deprived of it, the Lord suffered according to the perfect measure of the communion which was interrupted. Yet He gave glory to God — "But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel." The cup — for I pass over the outrages and insults of men: we may spare them — the cup was drunk. Who can tell the horrors of that suffering? The true pains of death, understood as God understands it, felt — according to the value of His presence — divinely, as by a man who depended on that presence as man. But all is accomplished; and that which God required in respect to sin is done — exhausted, and He is glorified as

to it: so that He has only to bless whosoever comes to Him through a Christ who is alive and was dead, and who lives for ever a man, for ever before God.

The sufferings of Christ in His body (real as they were), the insults and upbraidings of men, were but the preface of His affliction, which, by depriving Him as man of all consolation, left Him wholly in the place of judgment as made sin, to His sufferings\* in connection with the judgment of sin, when the God who would have been His full comfort was, as forsaking Him, the source of sorrow which left all the rest as unfelt and forgotten.

- [\* Psalm 22 is His appeal to God from the violence and wickedness of man to find Himself there forsaken and only sin in His sight, but perfect there. Christ suffered all from man — hostility, unrighteousness, desertion, denial, betrayal, and then, as trusting in God, forsaking. But what a spectacle, the one righteous Man who did put His trust in Him to have to declare, at the end of His life, openly to all, He was forsaken of God!



## JOHN

The Gospel of John has a peculiar character, as every Christian perceives. It does not present the birth of Christ in this world, looked at as the Son of David. It does not trace His genealogy back to Adam, in order to bring out His title of Son of man. It does not exhibit the Prophet who, by His testimony, accomplished the service of His Father in this respect here below. It is neither His birth, nor the commencement of His gospel, but His existence before the beginning of everything that had a beginning. "In the beginning was the Word." In short it is the glory of the Person of Jesus, the Son of God, above all dispensation — a glory developed in many ways in grace, but which is always itself. It is that which He is; but making us share in all the blessings that flow from it, when He is so manifested as to impart them.

The first chapter asserts what He was before all things, and the different characters in which He is a blessing to man, being made flesh. He is, and He is the expression of, the whole mind that subsists in God, the Logos. In the beginning He was. If we go back as far as is possible to the mind of men, how far soever beyond all that has had a beginning, He is. This is the most perfect idea we can form historically, if I may use such an expression, of the existence of God or of eternity. "In the beginning was the Word." Was there nothing beside Him? Impossible! Of what would He have been the Word? "The Word was with God." That is to say, a personal existence is ascribed to Him. But, lest it may be thought that He was something which eternity implies but which the Holy Ghost comes to reveal, it is said that He "was God." In His existence eternal — in His nature divine — in His Person distinct, He might have been spoken of as an emanation in time, as though His personality were of time, although eternal in His nature: the Spirit therefore adds, "In the beginning he was with God." It is the revelation of the eternal Logos before all creation. This Gospel therefore really begins before Genesis. The Book of Genesis gives us the history of the world in time: John gives us that of the Word, who existed in eternity before the world was; who — when man can speak of beginning — was; and, consequently, did not begin to exist. The language of the Gospel is as plain as possible, and, like the sword of paradise, turns

every way, in opposition to the thoughts and reasonings of man, to defend the divinity and personality of the Son of God.

By Him also were all things created. There are things which had a beginning; they all had their origin from Him: "All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." Precise, positive, and absolute distinction between all that has been made and Jesus. If anything has been made, it is not the Word; for all that has been made was made by that Word.

But there is another thing, besides the supreme act of creating all things (an act that characterises the Word) there is that which was in Him. All creation was made by Him; but it does not exist in Him. But in Him was life. In this He was in relation with an especial part of creation — a part which was the object of the thoughts and intentions of God. This "life was the light of men," revealed itself as a testimony to the divine nature, in immediate connection with them, as it did not with respect to any others at all.\* But, in fact, this light shone in the midst of that which was in its own nature\*\* contrary to it, and evil beyond any natural image, for where light comes, darkness is no longer: but here the light came, and the darkness had no perception of it — remained darkness, which therefore neither comprehended nor received it. These are the relations of the Word with creation and with man, seen abstractedly in His nature. The Spirit pursues this subject, giving us details, historically, of the latter part.

[\* The form of expression in Greek is very strong, as identifying completely the life with the light of men, as co-extensive propositions.]

[\*\* It is not here my object to develop the manner in which the word meets the errors of the human mind; but, in fact, as it reveals truth on God's part, it also replies, in a remarkable way, to all the mistaken thoughts of man. With respect to the Lord's Person, the first verses of the chapter bear witness to it. Here the error, which made of the principle of darkness a second God in equal conflict with the good Creator, is refuted by the simple testimony that the life was the light, and the darkness a moral condition, without power, and negative, in the midst of which this life was manifested in light. If we have the truth itself, we have no need to be acquainted with error. The voice of the Good Shepherd known, we are sure that none other is of Him. But, in fact, the possession of the truth, as revealed in the scripture, is an answer to all the errors into which man has fallen, innumerable as they are.]

We may remark here — and the point is of importance — how the Spirit passes from the divine and eternal nature of the Word who was before all things, to the manifestation, in this world, of the Word made flesh in the Person of Jesus. All the ways of God, the dispensations, His government of the world, are passed over in silence. In beholding Jesus on the earth we are in immediate connection with Him as existing before the world was. Only He is introduced by John, and that which is found in the world is recognised as created. John is come to bear witness of the Light. The true Light was that which, coming into the world, shone for all men, and not for the Jews only. He is come into the world; and the world, in darkness and blind, has not known Him. He is come unto His own, and His own (the Jews) have not received Him. But there were some who received Him. Of them two things are said: they have received authority to become the children\* of God, to take their place as such; and, secondly, they are, in fact, born of God. Natural descent, and the will of man, went for nothing here.

- [\* Sons in Paul's writings is the place Christians have in connection with God into which Christ has brought them by redemption, that is, His own relative place with God according to His counsels. Children is that they are of the Father's family. (Both are found in Romans 8:14-16, and the force of both may there be seen. We cry Father, so are children, but by the Spirit we take up the place of grown up sons with Christ before God.) Up to the end of verse 13, we have abstractedly what Christ intrinsically was and from eternity, and what man was — darkness. This first to the end of verse 5. Then God's dealings John's place and service; then the Light came, came into the world He had made, and it did not know Him, to His own, the Jews, and they would not have Him. But there were those, born of God, who had authority to take the place of children, a new race.]

Thus we have seen the Word, in His nature, abstractedly (v. 1-3); and, as life, the manifestation of divine light in man, with the consequences of that manifestation (v. 4, 5); and how He was received where it was so (v. 10-13). This general part, in regard to His nature, ends here. The Spirit carries on the history of what the Lord is, manifested as man on earth. So that, as it were, we begin again here (v. 14) with Jesus on the earth — what the Word became, not what He was. As light in the world, there was the unanswered claim of what He was on man. Not knowing Him, or rejecting Him where He was dispensationally in relationship was the only difference. Grace in life-giving power then comes in to lead men to receive Him. The world did not know its Creator come into it as light, His own

rejected their Lord. Those who were born not of man's will but of God received Him. Thus we have not what the Word was, but what He became.

The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us in the fullness of grace and truth. This is the great fact, the source of all blessing to us;\* that which is the full expression of God, adapted, by taking man's own nature, to all that is in man, to meet every human need, and all the capacity of the new nature in man to enjoy the expression of all in which God is suited to him. It is more than light, which is pure and shows all things; it is the expression of what God is, and God in grace, and as a source of blessing. And note, God could not be to angels what He is to man — grace, patience, mercy, love, as shown to sinners. And all this He is, as well as the blessedness of God, to the new man. The glory in which Christ was seen, thus manifested (by those who had eyes to see), was that of an only Son with His Father, the one concentrating object of His delight as Father.

[\* It is indeed the source of all blessing; but the condition of man was such, that without His death no one would have had any part in the blessing. Unless the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.]

These are the two parts of this great truth. The Word, who was with God and who was God, was made flesh; and He who was beheld on the earth had the glory of an only Son with the Father.

Two things are the result. Grace (what greater grace? It is love itself that is revealed, and towards sinners) and truth, that are not declared, but come, in Jesus Christ. The true relation of all things with God is shown, and their departure from it. This is the groundwork of truth. Everything takes its true place, its true character, in every respect; and the center to which all refers is God. What God is, what perfect man, what sinful man, what the world, what its prince, Christ's presence brings all out. Grace then and truth are come. The second thing is, that the only Son in the bosom of the Father reveals God, and reveals Him consequently as known by Himself in that position. And this is largely connected with the character and revelation of grace in John: first, fullness, with which we are in communication, and from which we have all received; then relationship.

But there are yet other important instructions in these verses. The Person of Jesus, the Word made flesh, dwelling among us, was full of grace and

truth. Of this fullness we have all received: not truth upon truth (truth is simple, and puts everything exactly in its place, morally and in its nature); but we have received that which we needed — grace upon grace, the favor of God abundantly, divine blessings (the fruit of His love) heaped one upon another. Truth shines — everything is perfectly manifested; grace is given.

The connection of this manifestation of the grace of God in the Word made flesh (in which perfect truth also displays itself) with other testimonies of God is then taught us. John bore witness to Him; the service of Moses had quite another character. John preceded Him in his service on earth; but Jesus must be preferred before him; for (humble as He might be) God above all, blessed for ever, He was before John, although coming after him. Moses gave the law, perfect in its place — requiring from man, on God's part, that which man ought to be. Then God was hidden, and God sent out a law showing what man ought to be; but now God has revealed Himself by Christ, and the truth (as to everything) and grace are come. The law was neither the truth, full and entire,\* in every respect, as in Jesus, nor grace; it was no transcript of God, but a perfect rule for man. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, not by Moses. Nothing can be more essentially important than this statement. Law requires from man what he ought to be before God, and, if he fulfills it, it is his righteousness. Truth in Christ shows what man is (not ought to be), and what God is, and, as inseparable from grace, does not require but brings to man what he needs. If thou knewest the gift of God, says the Savior to the Samaritan woman. So at the end of the wilderness journey Balaam has to say: "according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought?" The verb "came" is in the singular after grace and truth. Christ is both at once; indeed, if grace were not there He would not be the truth as to God. To require from man what he ought to be was righteous requirement. But to give grace and glory, to give His Son was another thing in every respect; only sanctioning the law as perfect in its place.

[\* Indeed it told what man ought to be, not what man or anything actually was, and this is properly truth.]

We have thus the character and the position of the Word made flesh — that which Jesus was here below, the Word made flesh; His glory as seen by faith, that of an only Son with His Father. He was full of grace and

truth. He revealed God as He knew Him, as the only-begotten Son in the bosom of the Father. It was not only the character of His glory here below; it is what He was (what He had been, what He ever is) in the Father's own bosom in the Godhead: and it is thus that He declared Him. He was before John the Baptist, although coming after him; and He brought, in His own Person, that which was in its nature entirely different from the law given by Moses.

Here then is the Lord manifested on earth. His relations with men follow, the positions He took, the characters He assumed, according to the purposes of God, and the testimony of His word among men. First of all, John the Baptist gives place to Him. It will be remarked that he bears testimony in each of the parts\* into which this chapter is divided — verse 6,\*\* in the effect of the abstract revelation of the nature of the Word; as light verse 15, with regard to His manifestation in the flesh; verse 19, the glory of His Person, although coming after John; verse 29, respecting His work and the result; and verse 36, the testimony for the time being, in order that He might be followed, as having come to seek the Jewish remnant.

[\* It will be observed that the chapter is thus divided:1-18 (this part is subdivided into 1-5, 6-13, 14-18), 19-28, 29-34 (sub-divided into 29-31, 32-34), 35 to the end. These last verses are subdivided into 35-42, and 42 to the end. That is, first, what Christ is abstractedly and intrinsically — John's testimony to Him as light; when come, what He is personally in the world — John, only forerunner of Jehovah, witness of Christ's excellency; the work of Christ (Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, He baptises with the Holy Ghost, and is Son of God); John gathers to Him; He gathers to Himself. This goes on till the upright remnant of Israel own Him Son of God, King of Israel; then He takes the larger character of Son of Man. All the personal characters of Christ, so to speak, are found here and His work, but not His relative characters, not Christ, not Priest, not Head of the assembly His body; but Word, Son of God, Lamb of God, Baptiser with the Holy Ghost; and, according to Psalm 2, Son of God, King of Israel; and Son of man, according to Psalm 8, whom the angels serve; God withal, life, and the light of men.]

[\*\* The strictly abstract statement ends in verse 5, and goes by itself. The reception of Christ as come into the world as light introduces John. We are no longer in what is strictly abstract; though not developing the object — what the Word became — it is historical as to the reception of the light, and thus shows what man was, and what he is by grace as born of God, in respect of the object.]

After the abstract revelation of the nature of the Word, and that of His manifestation in the flesh, the testimony actually born in the world is given. Verses 19-28 form a kind of introduction, in which, on the inquiry of the scribes and Pharisees, John gives account of himself, and takes occasion to speak of the difference between himself and the Lord. So that, whatever the characters may be that Christ takes in connection with His work, the glory of His Person is ever first in view. The witness is occupied naturally, so to speak, with this, before bearing his formal testimony to the office which he fulfilled. John is neither Elias nor that prophet (that is, the one of whom Moses spoke) nor the Christ. He is the voice mentioned by Isaiah, who was to prepare the way of the Lord before Him. It is not precisely before the Messiah, although He was that; neither is it Elias before the day of Jehovah, but the voice in the wilderness before the Lord (Jehovah) Himself. Jehovah was coming. It is this consequently of which he speaks. John baptised indeed unto repentance; but there was already One, unknown, among them, who, coming after him, was yet his superior, whose shoe's latchet he was not worthy to unloose.

We have next the direct testimony of John, when he sees Jesus coming to him. He points Him out, not as the Messiah, but according to the whole extent of His work as enjoyed by us in the everlasting salvation He has accomplished, and the full result of the glorious work by which it was accomplished. He is the Lamb of God, one whom God alone could furnish, and was for God, and according to His mind, who takes away the sin (not the sins) of the world. That is to say, He restores (not all the wicked, but) the foundations of the world's relations with God. Since the fall, it is indeed sin — whatever may be His dealings\* that God had to consider in His relations with the world. The result of Christ's work shall be, that this will no longer be the case; His work shall be the eternal basis of these relations in the new heavens and the new earth, sin being entirely put aside as such. We know this by faith before the public result in the world.

[\* As the flood, law, grace. There was a paradise of innocence, then a world of sin, by-and-by a kingdom of righteousness, finally a world (new heavens and new earth) wherein dwelleth righteousness. But it is everlasting righteousness, and founded on that work of the Lamb of God which can never lose its value. It is an immutable state of things. The church or assembly is something above and apart from all this, though revealed in it.]

Although a Lamb for the sacrifice, He is preferred before John the Baptist, for He was before him. The Lamb to be slain was Jehovah Himself.

In the administration of the ways of God, this testimony was to be born in Israel, although its subject was the Lamb whose sacrifice reached to the sin of the world, and the Lord, Jehovah. John had not known Him personally; but He was the one and only object of his mission.

But this was not all. He had made Himself man, and as man had received the fullness of the Holy Ghost, who had descended upon Him and abode upon Him; and the man thus pointed out, and sealed on the part of the Father, was Himself to baptise with the Holy Ghost. At the same time He was pointed out by the descent of the Holy Ghost in another character, to which John therefore bears testimony. Thus subsisting and seen and sealed on the earth, He was the Son of God. John recognises Him and proclaims Him as such.

Then comes what may be called the direct exercise and effect of his ministry at that time. But it is always the Lamb of whom he speaks; for that was the object, the design of God, and it is that which we have in this Gospel, although Israel is recognised in its place; for the nation held that place from God.

Upon this the disciples of John\* follow Christ to His abode. The effect of John's testimony is to attach the remnant to Jesus, the center of their gathering. Jesus does not refuse it, and they accompany Him. Nevertheless this remnant — how far soever the testimony of John might extend — do not, in fact, go beyond the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah. This was the case, historically;\*\* it but Jesus knew them thoroughly, and declares the character of Simon as soon as he comes to Him, and gives him his appropriate name. This was an act of authority which proclaimed Him the head and center of the whole system. God can bestow names; He knows all things. He gave this right to Adam, who exercised it according to God with regard to all that was put under him as well as in the case of his wife. Great kings, who claim this power, have done the same. Eve sought to do it, but she was mistaken; although God can give an understanding heart which, under His influence, speaks aright in this respect. Now Christ does so here, with authority and with all knowledge, the moment the case presents itself.



[\* Note, it is not on his public testimony, but on the expression of his heart addressed to no one, which they heard.]

[\*\* A principle of the deepest interest to us, as the effect of grace. In receiving Jesus we receive all that He is; notwithstanding that at the moment we may only perceive in Him that which is the least exalted part of His glory.]

Verse 43.\* We have next the immediate testimony of Christ Himself and of His followers. In the first place, on repairing to the scene of His earthly pilgrimage, according to the prophets, He calls others to follow Him. Nathanael, who begins by rejecting one who came from Nazareth, sets before us, I doubt not, the remnant of the last days (the testimony to which the gospel of grace belongs came first, verses 29-34). We see him at first rejecting the despised of the people, and under the fig-tree, which represents the nation of Israel; as the fig-tree which was to bear no more fruit, represents Israel under the old covenant. But Nathanael is the figure of a remnant, seen and known by the Lord, in connection with Israel. The Lord who thus manifested Himself to his heart and conscience is confessed as Son of God and King of Israel. This is formally the faith of the spared remnant of Israel in the last days according to Psalm 2. But those who thus received Jesus when He was on earth should see yet greater things than those which had convinced them. Moreover thenceforth\*\* they should see the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man. He who by His birth had taken His place among the children of men would, by that title, be the object of service to the most excellent of God's creatures. The expression is emphatic. The angels of God Himself should be in the service of the Son of man. So that the remnant of Israel without guile acknowledges Him to be the Son of God and King of Israel; and the Lord declares Himself also to be the Son of man — in humiliation indeed, but the object of service to the angels of God. Thus we have the Person and the titles of Jesus, from His eternal and divine existence as the Word, to His millennial place as King of Israel and Son of man; + which He already was as born into this world, but which will be realised when He returns in His glory.

[\* These verses 38 and 43 take in the two characters in which we have to do with Christ. He receives them and they abide with Him, and He calls upon them to follow Him. We have no world where we can abide, no center in it which gathers round itself those rightly disposed by grace. No prophet, no servant of God could. Christ is the one center of gathering in the world. Then following supposes that we are not in God's rest. In Eden no

following was called for. In heaven there will be none. It is perfect joy and rest where we are. In Christ we have a divine object, giving us a clear path through a world in which we cannot rest with God, for sin is there.]

[\*\* Not “hereafter.”

[+ Except what concerns the assembly and Israel. Here, He is not High Priest, He is not Head of the body, He is not revealed as the Christ. John does not give what shows man in heaven, but God in man on earth — not what is heavenly as gone up, but what is divine here. Israel is looked on all through as rejected. The disciples own Him as the Christ, but He is not so proclaimed.]

Before going farther, let us review some points in this chapter. The Lord is revealed as the Word — as God and with God — as light — as life: secondly, as the Word made flesh, having the glory of an only Son with His Father — as such He is full of grace and truth come by Him, of His fullness we have all received, and He has declared the Father (compare chap. 14) the Lamb of God — the One on whom the Holy Ghost could descend, and who baptised with the Holy Ghost — the Son of God;\* thirdly, His work what He does, Lamb of God taking away sin, and Son of God and King of Israel. This closes the revelation of His Person and work. Then verses 35-42 John’s ministry, but where Jesus, as He alone could, becomes the gathering center. Verse 43, Christ’s ministry, in which He calls to follow Him, which, with verses 38, 39, give His double character as the one attractive point in the world; with this His entire humiliation, but owned through a divine testimony reaching the remnant as according to Psalm 2, but the taking His title of Son of man according to Psalm 8 — the Son of man: we may say, all His personal titles. His relationship to the assembly is not here, nor His function as Priest; but that which belongs to His Person, and the connection of man with God in this world. Thus, besides His divine nature, it is all that He was and will be in this world: His heavenly place and its consequences to faith are taught elsewhere, and barely alluded to, when necessary, in this Gospel.

[\* Here He is seen as the Son of God in this world; in verse 14, He is in the glory of an only Son with His Father; and verse 18, He is so in the bosom of His Father.]

Observe that, in preaching Christ, in a way to a certain degree complete, the heart of the hearer may truly believe and attach itself to Him, though investing Him with a character which the condition of soul cannot yet go beyond, and while ignorant of the fullness in which He has been revealed.

Indeed where it is real, the testimony, however exalted in character, meets the heart where it is. John says, “Behold the Lamb of God!” “We have found the Messiah,” say the disciples who followed Jesus on John’s testimony.

Note also, that the expression of what was in John’s heart had greater effect than a more formal, more doctrinal testimony. He beheld Jesus, and exclaims, “Behold the Lamb of God!” The disciples heard him, and followed Jesus. It was, no doubt, his proper testimony on God’s part, Jesus being there; but it was not a doctrinal explanation like that of the preceding verses.

The two testimonies to Christ that were to be born in this world, both gathering to Him as center, had been born; that of John, and that of Jesus taking His place in Galilee with the remnant — the two days of God’s dealings with Israel here below.\* The third day we find in chapter 2. A marriage takes place in Galilee. Jesus is there; and the water of purification is changed into the wine of joy for the marriage-feast. Afterwards at Jerusalem He cleanses the temple of God with authority, executing judgment on all those who profaned it. In principle these are the two things that characterise His millennial position. Doubtless these things took place historically; but, as introduced here and in this manner, they have evidently a wider meaning. Besides, why the third day? After what? Two days of testimony had taken place — that of John, and that of Jesus; and now blessing and judgment are accomplished. In Galilee the remnant had their place; and it is the scene of blessing, according to Isaiah 9 — Jerusalem is that of judgment. At the feast He would not know His mother: this was the link of His natural relation with Israel, which, looking at Him as born under the law, was His mother. He separates Himself from her to accomplish blessing. It is only in testimony therefore in Galilee, for the moment. It is when He returns that the good wine will be for Israel — true blessing and joy at the end. Nevertheless He still abides with His mother, whom, as to His work, He did not acknowledge. And this also was the case with regard to His connection with Israel.

[\* Remark here, that Jesus accepts the place of that center round which souls are to be gathered — a very important principle. None else could hold this place. It was a divine one. The world was all wrong, without God, and a new gathering out of it was to be made round Him. Next, He furnishes the path in which man was to walk — “Follow me.” Adam in paradise needed

no path. Christ gives a divinely ordered one, in a world where of itself there could not be a right one, for its whole condition was the fruit of sin. Thirdly, He reveals man in His Person as the glorious Head over all, whom the highest creatures serve.]

Afterwards, in judging the Jews and judicially cleansing the temple, He presents Himself as the Son of God. It is His Father's house. The proof of this which He gives is His resurrection, when the Jews should have rejected and crucified Him. Moreover He was not only the Son: it was God who was there — not in the temple. It was empty — that house built by Herod. The body of Jesus was now the true temple. Sealed by His resurrection, the scriptures and the word of Jesus were of divine authority to the disciples, as speaking of Him according to the intention of the Spirit of God.

This subdivision of the book ends here. It closes the earthly revelation of Christ including His death; but even so it is the sin of the world. Chapter 2 gives the millennium; chapter 3 is the work in and for us which qualifies for the kingdom on earth or heaven; and the work for us, closing Messiah's connection with the Jews, opens the heavenly things by the lifting up of the Son of man — divine love and eternal life.

The miracles that He wrought convinced many as to their natural understanding. No doubt it was sincerely; but a just human conclusion. But another truth now opens. Man, in his natural state,\* was really incapable of receiving the things of God; not that the testimony was insufficient to convince him, nor that he was never convinced: many were so at this time; but Jesus did not commit Himself to them. He knew what man was. When convinced, his will, his nature, was not altered. Let the time of trial come, and he would show himself as he was, alienated from God, and even His enemy. Sad but too true testimony! The life, the death, of Jesus proves it. He knew it when He began His work. This did not make His love grow cold; for the strength of that love was in itself.

[\* Observe, that the state of man is here manifested fully and thoroughly. Supposing him to be outwardly righteous according to the law, and to believe in Jesus according to sincere natural convictions, he clothes himself with this, in order to hide from himself what he really is. He does not know himself at all. What he is remains untouched. And he is a sinner. But this leads us to another observation. There are two great principles from Paradise itself — responsibility and life. Man can never disentangle them, till he learns that he is lost, and that no good exists in him. Then he is glad to

know that there is a source of life and pardon outside himself. It is this which is shown us here. There must be a new life; Jesus does not instruct a nature which is only sin. These two principles run through scripture in a remarkable way: first, as stated, in Paradise, responsibility and life in power. Man took of one tree, failing in responsibility, and forfeited life. The law gave the measure of responsibility when good and evil were known, and promised life on the ground of doing what it required, satisfying responsibility. Christ comes, meets the need of man's failure in responsibility, and is, and gives, eternal life. Thus, and thus only, can the question be met, and the two principles reconciled. Moreover two things are presented in Him to reveal God. He knows man, and all men. What a knowledge in this world! A prophet knows that which is revealed to him; he has, in that case, divine knowledge. But Jesus knows all men in an absolute way. He is God. But when once He has introduced life in grace, He speaks of another thing; He speaks that which He knows, and testifies that which He has seen. Now He knows God His Father in heaven. He is the Son of man who is in heaven. He knows man divinely; but He knows God and all His glory divinely also. What a magnificent picture, or, rather should I say, revelation, of that which He is for us! For it is here as man that He tells us this; and also, in order that we may enter into it and enjoy it, He becomes the sacrifice for sin according to the eternal love of God His Father.]

But there was a man (chap. 3) and that a Pharisee — who was not satisfied with this inoperative conviction. His conscience was reached. Seeing Jesus, and hearing His testimony, had produced a sense of need in his heart. It is not the knowledge of grace, but it is with respect to man's condition a total change. He knows nothing of the truth, but he has seen that it is in Jesus, and he desires it. He has also at once an instinctive sense that the world will be against him; and he comes by night. The heart fears the world as soon as it has to do with God; for the world is opposed to Him. The friendship of the world is enmity against God. This sense of need made the difference in the case of Nicodemus. He had been convinced like the others. Accordingly he says, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God." And the source of this conviction was the miracles. But Jesus stops him short; and that on account of the true need felt in the heart of Nicodemus. The work of blessing was not to be wrought by teaching the old man. Man needed to be renewed in the source of his nature, without which he could not see the kingdom.\* The things of God are spiritually discerned; and man is carnal, he has not the Spirit. The Lord does not go beyond the kingdom — which, moreover, was not the law — for Nicodemus ought to have known something about the kingdom. But He does not begin to teach the Jews as a prophet under the law. He presents the kingdom itself; but to see it, according to His testimony, a man must be born again. But the

kingdom as thus come in the carpenter's Son could not be seen without a wholly new nature, it struck no chord of man's comprehension or Jews' expectation, though testimony to it was amply given in word and work: as to entering and having a part in it there is more development as to the how. Nicodemus sees no farther than the flesh.

[\* That is, as it was then come. They saw the carpenter's Son. In glory, of course, every eye on earth shall see it.]

The Lord explains Himself. Two things were necessary — to be born of water, and of the Spirit. Water cleanses. And, spiritually, in his affections, heart, conscience, thoughts, actions, etc., man lives, and in practice is morally purified, through the application, by the power of the Spirit, of the word of God, which judges all things, and works in us livingly new thoughts and affections. This is the water; it is withal the death of the flesh. The true water which cleanses in a christian way came forth from the side of a dead Christ. He came by water and blood, in the power of cleansing and of expiation. He sanctifies the assembly by cleansing it through the washing of water by the word. "Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." It is therefore the mighty word of God which, since man must be born again in the principle and source of his moral being, judges, as being death, all that is of the flesh.\* But there is in fact the communication of a new life; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, is not flesh, has its nature from the Spirit. It is not the Spirit — that would be an incarnation; but this new life is spirit. It partakes of the nature of its origin. Without this, man cannot enter into the kingdom. But this is not all. If it was a necessity for the Jew, who already was nominally a child of the kingdom, for here we deal with what is essential and true, it was also a sovereign act of God, and consequently it is accomplished wherever the Spirit acts in this power. "So is every one that is born of the Spirit." This in principle opens the door to the Gentiles.

[\* Observe here that baptism, instead of being the sign of the gift of life, is the sign of death. We are baptised to His death. In coming up out of the water, we begin a new life in resurrection (all that belonged to the natural man being reckoned to be dead in Christ, and passed away for ever). "Ye are dead"; and "he that is dead is freed justified] from sin." But we live also and have a good conscience by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus Peter compares baptism to the deluge, through which Noah was saved, but which destroyed the old world, that had, as it were, a new life when it emerged from the flood.]

Nevertheless Nicodemus, as a master of Israel, ought to have understood this. The prophets had declared that Israel was to undergo this change, in order to enjoy the fulfillment of the promises (see Ezekiel 36), which God had given them with regard to their blessing in the holy land. But Jesus spoke of these things in an immediate way, and in connection with the nature and the glory of God Himself. A master in Israel ought to have known that which the sure word of prophecy contained. The Son of God declared that which He knew, and that which He had seen with His Father. The defiled nature of man could not be in relationship with Him who revealed Himself in heaven whence Jesus came. The glory (from the fullness of which He came, and which formed therefore the subject of His testimony as having seen it, and from which the kingdom had its origin) could have nothing in it that was defiled. They must be born again to possess it. He bore testimony therefore, as having come from above and knowing that which was suitable to God His Father. Man did not receive His testimony. Convinced outwardly by miracles he might be; but to receive that which was befitting the presence of God was another thing. And if Nicodemus could not receive the truth in its connection with the earthly part of the kingdom, of which even the prophets had spoken, what would he and the other Jews do if Jesus spoke of heavenly things? Nevertheless no one could learn anything about them by any other means. No one had gone up there and come down again to bring back word. Jesus only, in virtue of what He was, could reveal them — the Son of man on earth, existing at the same time in heaven, the manifestation to men of that which was heavenly, of God Himself in man as God being in heaven and everywhere — as the Son of man being before the eyes of Nicodemus and of all. Nevertheless He was to be crucified, and thus lifted up from the world to which He had come as the manifestation of the love of God in all His ways and of God Himself, and so only could the door be opened for sinful men into heaven, so only a link formed for man with it.

For this brought out another fundamental truth. If heaven was in question, something more was needed than being born again. Sin existed. It must be put away for those who should have eternal life. And if Jesus, coming down from heaven, was come to impart this eternal life to others, He must, in undertaking this work, put sin away — be thus made sin — in order that the dishonor done to God should be washed away, and the truth of

His character (without which there is nothing sure, or good, or righteous) maintained. The Son of man must be lifted up, even as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, that the curse, under which the people were dying, might be removed. His divine testimony rejected, man, as he was down here, showed himself to be incapable of receiving blessing from above. He must be redeemed, his sin expiated and put away; he must be treated according to the reality of his condition, and according to the character of God who cannot deny Himself. Jesus in grace undertook to do this. It was necessary that the Son of man should be lifted up, rejected from the earth by man, accomplishing the atonement before the God of righteousness. In a word, Christ comes with the knowledge of what heaven is and divine glory. In order that man might share it, the Son of man must die — must take the place of expiation — outside the earth.\* Observe here the deep and glorious character of that which Jesus brought with Him, of the revelation He made.

[\* On the cross, Christ is not on the earth, but lifted up from it, rejected ignominiously by man, but withal through this presented as a victim on the altar to God.]

The cross, and the absolute separation between man on earth and God — this is the meeting-place of faith and God; for there is at once the truth of man's condition, and the love that meets it. Thus, in approaching the holy place from the camp, the first thing they met on going through the gate of the court was the altar. It presented itself to every one that quitted the world without, and entered in. Christ, lifted up from the earth, draws all men to Him. But if (owing to man's state of alienation and guilt) it needed that the Son of man should be lifted up from the earth, in order that whosoever believes in Him should have everlasting life, there was another aspect of this same glorious fact; God had so loved the world that He had given His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should have everlasting life. On the cross we see the necessity morally of the death of the Son of man; we see the ineffable gift of the Son of God. These two truths unite in the common object of the gift of eternal life to all believers. And if it was to all believers, it was a question of man, of God, and of heaven, and went outside the promises made to the Jews, and the limits of God's dealings with that people. For God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it. But salvation is by faith; and he who believes in the coming of the Son, putting all things now to the test, is not



condemned (his state is decided thereby); he who believes not is condemned already, he has not believed in the only begotten Son of God, he has manifested his condition.

And this is the thing that God lays to their charge. Light is come into the world, and they have loved darkness because their works were evil. Could there be a more just subject of condemnation? It was no question of their not finding pardon, but of their preferring darkness to light that they might continue in sin.

The rest of the chapter presents the contrast between the positions of John and of Christ. They are both before the eye. The one is the faithful friend of the Bridegroom, living only for Him; the other is the Bridegroom, to whom all belongs: the one, in himself, an earthly man, great as might be the gift he had received from heaven; the other from heaven Himself, and above all. The bride was His. The friend of the Bridegroom, hearing His voice, was full of joy. Nothing more beautiful than this expression of John the Baptist's heart, inspired by the Lord's presence, near enough to Jesus to be glad and rejoice that Jesus was all. Thus it ever is.

With respect to the testimony, John bore witness in connection with earthly things. For that end he was sent. He who Himself came from heaven was above all, and bore witness of heavenly things, of that which He had seen and heard. No one received His testimony. Man was not of heaven. Without grace one believes according to one's own thoughts. But in speaking as a man on the earth, Jesus spoke the words of God; and he who received His testimony set to his seal that God was true. For the Spirit is not given by measure. As a witness the testimony of Jesus was the testimony of God Himself; His words, the words of God. Precious truth! Moreover, He was the Son,\* and the Father loved Him, and had given all things into His hand. This is another glorious title of Christ, another aspect of His glory. But the consequences of this for man were eternal. It was not almighty help to pilgrims, nor faithfulness to promises, so that His people could trust in Him in spite of all. It was the quickening life-giving Son of the Father. All was comprised in it. "He who believeth in the Son hath everlasting life, he who believeth not shall not see life." He remains in his guilt. The wrath of God abides on him.

[\* The question presents itself naturally, where John's testimony closes and the evangelist's begins. The last two verses, I apprehend, are the evangelist's.]

All this is a kind of introduction. The ministry of the Lord, properly so called, comes after. John (v. 24) was not yet cast into prison. It was not till after that event that the Lord began His public testimony. The chapter we have been considering explains what His ministry was, the character in which He came, His position, the glory of His Person, the character of the testimony He bore, the position of man in connection with the things of which He spake, beginning with the Jews, and going on, by the new birth, the cross, and the love of God, to His rights as come into the world, and the supreme dignity of His own Person, to His properly divine testimony, to His relationship with the Father, the object of whose love He was, and who had given all things into His hand. He was the faithful witness, and that of heavenly things (see chap. 3:13), but He was also the Son Himself come from the Father. Everything for man rested on faith in Him. The Lord comes out from Judaism, while presenting the testimony of the prophets, and brings from heaven the direct testimony of God and of glory, showing the only ground on which we can have a part in it. Jew or Gentile must be born again; and heavenly things could only be entered by the cross, the wondrous proof of God's love to the world. John gives place to Him, bringing out — not in public testimony to Israel but to his disciples — the true glory of His Person and of His work\* in this world. The thought of the bride and Bridegroom is, I believe, general. John says indeed that he is not the Christ, and that the earthly bride belongs to Jesus; but He has never taken her; and John speaks of His rights, which for us are realised in a better land and another clime than this world. It is, I repeat, the general idea. But we have now entered on the new ground of a new nature, the cross, and the world and God's love to it.

[\* Observe here, that the Lord — while not concealing (v. 11-13) the character of His testimony, as indeed He could not — speaks of the necessity of His death, and of the love of God. John speaks of the glory of His Person. Jesus magnifies His Father by submitting to the necessity which the condition of men imposed on Him, if He would bring them into a new relationship with God. "God," said He, "hath so loved." John magnifies Jesus. All is perfect and in place. There are four points in that which is said with regard to Jesus: His supremacy; His testimony — this is the Baptist's testimony to Him. What follows (v. 35, 36) His having all things given to Him by the Father who loved Him, life everlasting in contrast with the wrath that is the portion of the unbeliever from God — is rather the new revelation; the purpose of

God giving all things to Him, and His being Himself eternal life come down from heaven, is that of John the evangelist.]

And now (chap. 4) Jesus, being driven away by the jealousy of the Jews, begins His ministry outside that people, while still acknowledging their true position in the dealings of God. He goes away into Galilee; but His road led Him by Samaria, in which dwelt a mingled race of strangers and of Israel's race who had forsaken the idolatry of the strangers, but who, while following the law of Moses and calling themselves by the name of Jacob, had set up a worship of their own at Gerizim. Jesus does not enter the town. Being weary He sits down outside the town on the brink of the well — for He must needs go that way; but this necessity was an occasion for the acting of that divine grace which was in the fullness of His Person, and which overflowed the narrow limits of Judaism.

There are some preliminary details to remark before entering on the subject of this chapter. Jesus did not Himself baptise, for He knew the whole extent of the counsels of God in grace, the true object of His coming. He could not bind souls by baptism to a living Christ. The disciples were right in so doing. They had so to receive Christ. It was faith on their part.

When rejected by the Jews, the Lord does not contend. He leaves them; and, coming to Sychar, He found Himself in the most interesting associations as regards the history of Israel, but in Samaria: sad testimony of Israel's ruin. Jacob's well was in the hands of people who called themselves of Israel, but the greater part of whom were not so, and who worshipped they knew not what, although pretending to be of the stock of Israel. Those who were really Jews had driven away the Messiah by their jealousy. He a man despised by the people — had gone away from among them. We see Him sharing the sufferings of humanity, and, weary with His journey, finding only the side of a well on which to rest at noon. He contents Himself with it. He seeks nothing but the will of His God: it brought Him thither. The disciples were away; and God brought thither at that unusual hour a woman by herself. It was not the hour at which women went out to draw water; but, in the ordering of God, a poor sinful woman and the Judge of quick and dead thus met together.

The Lord, weary and thirsty, had no means even to quench His thirst. He is dependent as man, on this poor woman to have a little water for His

thirst. He asks it of her. The woman, seeing that He is a Jew, is surprised; and now the divine scene unfolds itself, in which the heart of the Savior, rejected by men and oppressed by the unbelief of His people, opens to let that fullness of grace flow out which finds its occasion in the necessities and not in the righteousness of men. Now this grace did not limit itself to the rights of Israel, nor lend itself to national jealousy. It was a question of the gift of God, of God Himself who was there in grace, and of God come down so low, that, being born among His people, He was dependent, as to His human position, on a Samaritan woman for a drop of water to quench His thirst. "If thou knewest the gift of God, and not, who I am, but] who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink"; that is to say, If thou hadst known that God gives freely, and the glory of His Person who was there, and how deeply He had humbled Himself, His love would have been revealed to thy heart, and would have filled it with perfect confidence, in regard even to the wants which a grace like this would have awakened in thy heart. "Thou wouldest have asked," said the divine Savior, "and he would have given thee" the living water that springeth up into everlasting life. Such is the heavenly fruit of the mission of Christ, wherever He is received.\* His heart lays it open (it was revealing Himself), pours it out into the heart of one who was its object; consoling itself for the unbelief of the Jews (rejecting the end of promise) by presenting the true consolation of grace to the misery that needed it. This is the true comfort of love, which is pained when unable to act. The floodgates of grace are lifted up by the misery which that grace waters. He makes manifest that which God is in grace; and the God of grace was there. Alas! the heart of man, withered up and selfish, and pre-occupied with its own miseries (the fruits of sin), cannot at all understand this. The woman sees something extraordinary in Jesus; she is curious to know what it means — is struck with His manner, so that she has a measure of faith in His words; but her desires are limited to the relief of the toils of her sorrowful life, in which an ardent heart found no answer to the misery it had acquired for its portion through sin.

[\* Note, too, here, that it is not as with Israel in the wilderness that there was water from the smitten rock to drink. Here the promise is of a well of water springing up unto everlasting life in ourselves.]

A few words on the character of this woman. I believe the Lord would show that there is need, that the fields were ready for the harvest; and that

if the wretched self-righteousness of the Jews rejected Him, the stream of grace would find its channel elsewhere, God having prepared hearts to hail it with joy and thanksgiving, because it answered their misery and need — not the righteous. The channel of grace was dug by the need and the misery which the grace itself caused to be felt.

The life of this woman was shameful; but she was ashamed of it; at the least her position had isolated her, by separating her from the crowd that forgets itself in the tumult of social life. And there is no inward grief like an isolated heart; but Christ and grace more than meets it. Its isolation more than ceases. He was more isolated than she. She came alone to the well; she was not with the other women. Alone, she met with the Lord, by the wonderful guidance of God who brought her there. The disciples even must go away to make room for her. They knew nothing of this grace. They baptised indeed in the name of a Messiah in whom they believed. It was well. But God was there in grace — He who would judge the quick and the dead — and with Him a sinner in her sins. What a meeting! And God who had stooped so low as to be dependent on her for a little water to quench His thirst!

She had an ardent nature. She had sought for happiness; she had found misery. She lived in sin, and was weary of life. She was indeed in the lowest depths of misery. The ardor of her nature found sin no obstacle. She went on, alas! to the uttermost. The will, engaged in evil, feeds on sinful desires, and wastes itself without fruit. Nevertheless her soul was not without a sense of need. She thought of Jerusalem, she thought of Gerizim. She waited for the Messiah, who would tell them all things. Did this change her life? In no wise. Her life was shocking. When the Lord speaks of spiritual things, in language well suited to awaken the heart, directing her attention to heavenly things in a way that one would have thought it impossible to misunderstand, she cannot comprehend it. The natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit: they are spiritually discerned.

The novelty of the Lord's address excited her attention, but did not lead her thoughts beyond her waterpot, the symbol of her daily toil; although she saw that Jesus took the place of one greater than Jacob. What was to be done? God wrought — He wrought in grace, and in this poor woman.

Whatever the occasion might be as regards herself, it was He who had brought her thither. But she was unable to comprehend spiritual things though expressed in the plainest manner; for the Lord spoke of the water that springs up in the soul unto everlasting life. But as the human heart is ever revolving in its own circumstances and cares, her religious need was limited practically to the traditions by which her life, as regarded its religious thoughts and habits, was formed, leaving still a void that nothing could fill. What then was to be done? In what way can this grace act, when the heart does not understand the spiritual grace which the Lord brings? This is the second part of the marvelous instruction here. The Lord deals with her conscience. A word spoken by Him who searches the heart, searches her conscience: she is in the presence of a man who tells her all that ever she did. For, her conscience awakened by the word, and finding itself laid open to the eye of God, her whole life is before her.

And who is He that thus searches the heart? She feels that His word is the word of God. "Thou art a prophet." Intelligence in divine things comes by the conscience, not by the intellect. The soul and God are together, if we may so speak, whatever instrument is employed. She has everything to learn, no doubt; but she is in the presence of Him who teaches everything. What a step! What a change! What a new position! This soul, which saw no farther than her waterpot and felt her toil more than her sin, is there alone with the Judge of quick and dead — with God Himself. And in what manner? She knows not. She only felt that it was Himself in the power of His own word. But at least He did not despise her, as others did. Although she was alone, she was alone with Him. He had spoken to her of life — of the gift of God; He had told her that she had only to ask and have. She had understood nothing of His meaning; but it was not condemnation, it was grace — grace that stooped to her, that knew her sin and was not repelled by it, that asked her for water, that was above Jewish prejudice with regard to her, as well as the contempt of the humanly righteous — grace which did not conceal her sin from her, which made her feel that God knew it nevertheless, He who knew it was there without alarming her. Her sin was before God, but not in judgment.

Marvellous meeting of a soul with God, which the grace of God accomplishes by Christ! Not that she reasoned about all these things; but she was under the effect of their truth without accounting for it to herself;

for the word of God had reached her conscience, and she was in the presence of Him who had accomplished it, and He was meek and lowly, and glad to receive a little water at her hands. Her defilement did not defile Him. She could, in fact, trust in Him, without knowing why. It is thus that God acts. Grace inspires confidence — brings back the soul to God in peace, before it has any intelligent knowledge, or can explain it to itself. In this way, full of trust, she begins (it was the natural consequence) with the questions that filled her own heart; thus giving the Lord an opportunity of fully explaining the ways of God in grace. God had so ordered it; for the question was far from the sentiments which grace afterwards led her to. The Lord replies according to her condition: salvation was of the Jews. They were the people of God. Truth was with them, and not with the Samaritans who worshipped they knew not what. But God put all that aside. It was now neither at Gerizim nor at Jerusalem, that they should worship the Father who manifested Himself in the Son. God was a spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. Moreover the Father sought such worshippers. That is to say, the worship of their hearts must answer to the nature of God, to the grace of the Father who had sought them.\* Thus true worshippers should worship the Father in spirit and in truth. Jerusalem and Samaria disappear entirely — have no place before such a revelation of the Father in grace. God no longer hid Himself; He was revealed perfectly in light. The perfect grace of the Father wrought, in order to make Him known, by the grace that brought souls to Him.

[\* It will be found in John's writings that, when responsibility is spoken of, God is the word used; when grace to us, the Father and the Son. When indeed it is goodness (God's character in Christ) towards the world, then God is spoken of.]

Now the woman was not yet brought to Him; but, as we have seen in the case of the disciples and of John the Baptist, a glorious revelation of Christ acts upon the soul where it is, and brings the Person of Jesus into connection with the need already felt. "The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh; and when he is come, he will tell us all things." Small as her intelligence might be, and unable as she was to understand what Jesus had told her, His love meets her where she can receive blessing and life; and He replies, "I, that speak unto thee, am he." The work was done: the Lord was received. A poor Samaritan sinner receives the Messiah of Israel, whom the priests and the Pharisees had rejected from among the

people. The moral effect upon the woman is evident. She forgets her waterpot, her toil, her circumstances. She is engrossed by this new object that is revealed to her soul — by Christ; so engrossed that, without thinking, she becomes a preacher; that is, she proclaims the Lord in the fullness of her heart and with perfect simplicity. He had told her all that she had ever done. She does not think at that moment of what it was. Jesus had told it her; and the thought of Jesus takes away the bitterness of the sin. The sense of His goodness removes the guile of heart that seeks to conceal its sin. In a word, her heart is entirely filled with Christ Himself. Many believed in Him through her declaration — "He has told me all that ever I did"; many more, when they had heard Him. His own word carried with it a stronger conviction, as more immediately connected with His Person.

Meanwhile the disciples come, and — naturally — marvel at His talking with the woman. Their Master, the Messiah — they understood this; but the grace of God manifested in the flesh was still beyond their thoughts. The work of this grace was the meat of Jesus, and that in the lowliness of obedience as sent of God. He was taken up with it, and, in the perfect humility of obedience, it was His joy and His food to do His Father's will, and to finish His work. And the case of this poor woman had a voice that filled His heart with deep joy, wounded as it was in this world, because He was love. If the Jews rejected Him, still the fields in which grace sought its fruits for the everlasting granary were white already to harvest. He, therefore, who labored should not fail of his wages, nor of the joy of having such fruit unto life eternal. Nevertheless, even the apostles were but reapers where others had sown. The poor woman was a proof of this. Christ, present and revealed, met the need which the testimony of the prophet had awakened. Thus (while exhibiting a grace which revealed the love of the Father, of God the Savior, and coming out, consequently, from the pale of the Jewish system) He fully recognised the faithful service of His laborers in former days, the prophets who, by the Spirit of Christ from the beginning of the world, had spoken of the Redeemer, of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that should follow. The sowers and the reapers should rejoice together in the fruit of their labors.

But what a picture is all this of the purpose of grace, and of its mighty and living fullness in the Person of Christ, of the free gift of God, and of the



incapability of the spirit of man to apprehend it, preoccupied and blinded as he is by present things, seeing nothing beyond the life of nature, although suffering from the consequences of his sin! At the same time, we see that it is in the humiliation, the deep abasement, of the Messiah, of Jesus, that God Himself is manifested in this grace. It is this that breaks down the barriers, and gives free course to the torrent of grace from on high. We see, also, that conscience is the doorway of understanding in the things of God. We are brought truly into relationship with God when He searches the heart. This is always the case. We are then in the truth. Moreover God thus manifests Himself, and the grace and love of the Father. He seeks worshippers, and that, according to this double revelation of Himself, however great His patience may be with those who do not see farther than the first step of the promises of God. If Jesus is received, there is a thorough change; the work of conversion is wrought; there is faith. At the same time what a divine picture of our Jesus — humbled, indeed, but even thereby the manifestation of God in love, the Son of the Father, He who knows the Father, and accomplishes His work! What a glorious and boundless scene opens before the soul that is admitted to see and to know Him!

The whole range of grace is open to us here in His work and its divine extent, in that which regards its application to the individual, and the personal intelligence we may have respecting it. It is not precisely pardon, nor redemption, nor the assembly. It is grace flowing in the Person of Christ; and the conversion of the sinner, in order that he may enjoy it in himself, and be capable of knowing God and of worshipping the Father of grace. But how entirely have we broken out in principle from the narrow limits of Judaism!

Nevertheless in His personal ministry, the Lord, always faithful, putting Himself aside in order to glorify His Father by obeying Him, repairs to the sphere of labor appointed Him of God. He leaves the Jews, for no prophet is received in his own country, and goes into Galilee, among the despised of His people, the poor of the flock, where obedience, grace, and the counsels of God alike placed Him. In that sense, He did not forsake His people, perverse as they were. There He works a miracle which expresses the effect of His grace in connection with the believing remnant of Israel, feeble as their faith might be. He comes again to the place where He had

turned the water of purification into the wine of joy (“which cheereth God and man”). By that miracle He had, in figure, displayed the power which should deliver the people, and by which, being received, He would establish the fullness of joy in Israel, creating by that power the good wine of the nuptials of Israel with their God. Israel rejected it all. The Messiah was not received. He retired among the poor of the flock in Galilee, after having shown to Samaria (in passing) the grace of the Father, which went beyond all promises to, and dealings with, the Jew, and in the Person and the humiliation of Christ led converted souls to worship the Father (outside all Jewish system, true or false) in spirit and in truth; and there, in Galilee, He works a second miracle in the midst of Israel, where He still labors, according to His Father’s will, that is to say, wherever there is faith; not yet, perhaps, in His power to raise the dead, but to heal and save the life of that which was ready to perish. He fulfilled the desire of that faith, and restored the life of one who was at the point of death. It was this, in fact, which He was doing in Israel while here below. These two great truths were set forth — that which He was going to do according to the purposes of God the Father, as being rejected; and that which He was doing at the time for Israel, according to the faith He found among them.

In the chapters that follow we shall find the rights and the glory shown forth that attach to His Person; the rejection of His word and of His work; the sure salvation of the remnant, and of all His sheep wherever they may be. Afterwards — acknowledged by God, as manifested on earth, the Son of God, of David, and of man — that which He will do when gone away, and the gift of the Holy Ghost, are unfolded; also the position in which He placed the disciples before the Father, and with regard to Himself. And then — after the history of Gethsemane, the giving of His own life, His death as giving His life for us — the whole result, in the ways of God, until His return, is briefly given in the chapter that closes the book.

We may go more rapidly through the chapters till the tenth, not as of little importance — far from it — but as containing some great principles which may be pointed out, each in its place, without requiring much explanation.

**CHAPTER 5** contrasts the quickening power of Christ, the power and the right of giving life to the dead, with the powerlessness of legal ordinances. They required strength in the person that was to profit by them. Christ

brought with Him the power that was to heal, and indeed to quicken. Further, all judgment is committed to Him, so that those who had received life would not come into judgment. The end of the chapter sets forth the testimonies that have been born to Him, and the guilt therefore of those who would not come to Him to have life. One is sovereign grace, the other responsibility because life was there. To have life His divine power was needed; but in rejecting Him, in refusing to come unto Him that they might have life, they did so in spite of the most positive proofs.

Let us go a little into the details. The poor man who had an infirmity for thirty-eight years was absolutely hindered, by the nature of his disease, from profiting by means that required strength to use them. This is the character of sin, on the one hand, and of law on the other. Some remains of blessing still existed among the Jews. Angels, ministers of that dispensation, still wrought among the people. Jehovah did not leave Himself without testimony. But strength was needed to profit by this instance of their ministry. That which the law could not do, being weak through the flesh, God has done through Jesus. The impotent man had desire, but not strength; to will was present with him, but no power to perform. The Lord's question brings this out. A single word from Christ does everything. "Rise, take up thy bed and walk." Strength is imparted. The man rises, and goes away carrying his bed.\*

[\* Christ brings the strength with Him which the law requires in man himself to profit by it.]

It was the Sabbath — an important circumstance here, holding a prominent place in this interesting scene. The Sabbath was given as a token of the covenant between the Jews and the Lord.\* But it had been proved that the law did not give God's rest to man. The power of a new life was needed; grace was needed, that man might be in relationship with God. The healing of this poor man was an operation of this same grace, of this same power, but wrought in the midst of Israel. The pool of Bethesda supposed power in man; the act of Jesus employed power, in grace, on behalf of one of the Lord's people in distress. Therefore, as dealing with His people in government, He says to the man, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee." It was Jehovah acting by His grace and blessing among His people; but it was in temporal things, the tokens of His favor and lovingkindness, and in connection with His government in Israel. Still it

was divine power and grace. Now, the man told the Jews that it was Jesus. They rise up against Him under the pretense of a violation of the Sabbath. The Lord's answer is deeply affecting, and full of instruction — a whole revelation. It declares the relationship, now openly revealed by His coming, that existed between Himself (the Son) and His Father. It shows — and what depths of grace! — that neither the Father nor Himself could find their Sabbath\*\* in the midst of misery and of the sad fruits of sin. Jehovah in Israel might impose the Sabbath as an obligation by the law, and make it a token of the previous truth that His people should enter into the rest of God. But, in fact, when God was truly known, there was no rest in existing things; nor was this all — He wrought in grace, His love could not rest in misery. He had instituted a rest in connection with the creation, when it was very good. Sin, corruption, and misery had entered into it. God, the holy and the just, no longer found a Sabbath in it, and man did not really enter into God's rest (compare Hebrews 4). Of two things, one: either God must, in justice, destroy the guilty race; or — and this is what He did, according to His eternal purposes — He must begin to work in grace, according to the redemption which the state of man required — a redemption in which all His glory is unfolded. In a word, He must begin to work again in love. Thus the Lord says, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." God cannot be satisfied where there is sin. He cannot rest with misery in sight. He has no Sabbath, but still works in grace. How divine an answer to their wretched cavils!

[\* The Sabbath is introduced, whatever new institution or arrangement is established under the law. And in truth, a part in the rest of God is, in certain aspects, the highest of our privileges (see Hebrews 4). The Sabbath was the close of the first or this creation, and will be so when fulfilled. Our rest is in the new one, and that not in the first man's creation state but risen, Christ the second Man being its beginning and head. Hence the first day of the week.]

[\*\* God's Sabbath is a Sabbath of love and holiness.]

Another truth came out from that which the Lord said: He put Himself on an equality with His Father. But the Jews, jealous for their ceremonies — for that which distinguished them from other nations — saw nothing of the glory of Christ, and seek to kill Him, treating Him as a blasphemer. This gives Jesus occasion to lay open the whole truth on this point. He was not like an independent being with equal rights, another God who acted on His

own account, which, moreover, is impossible. There cannot be two supreme and omnipotent beings. The Son is in full union with the Father, does nothing without the Father, but does whatsoever He sees the Father do. There is nothing that the Father does which He does not in communion with the Son; and greater proofs of this should yet be seen, that they might marvel. This last sentence of the Lord's words, as well as the whole of this Gospel, shows that, while revealing absolutely that He and the Father are one, He reveals it, and speaks of it as in a position in which He could be seen of men. The thing of which He speaks is in God; the position in which He speaks of it is a position taken, and, in a certain sense, inferior. We see everywhere that He is equal to, and one with, the Father. We see that He receives all from the Father, and does all after the Father's mind. (This is shown very remarkably in chapter 17). It is the Son, but the Son manifested in the flesh, acting in the mission which the Father sent Him to fulfill.

Two things are spoken of in this chapter (v. 21, 22) which demonstrate the glory of the Son. He quickens and He judges. It is not healing that is in question — a work which, at bottom, springs from the same source, and has its occasion in the same evil: but the giving of life in a manner evidently divine. As the Father raises the dead and quickens them, so the Son quickens whom He will. Here we have the first proof of His divine rights, He gives life, and He gives it to whom He will. But, being incarnate, He may be personally dishonored, disallowed, despised of men. Consequently all judgment is committed unto Him, the Father judging no man, in order that all, even those who have rejected the Son, should honor Him, even as they honor the Father whom they own as God. If they refuse when He acts in grace, they shall be compelled when He acts in judgment. In life, we have communion by the Holy Ghost with the Father and the Son (and quickening or giving life is the work alike of the Father and the Son); but in the judgment, unbelievers will have to do with the Son of man whom they have rejected. The two things are quite distinct. He whom Christ has quickened will not need to be compelled to honor Him by undergoing judgment. Jesus will not call into judgment one whom He has saved by quickening him.

How may we know, then, to which of these two classes we belong? The Lord (praised be His name!) replies, he that hears His word, and believes

Him who sent Him (believes the Father by hearing Christ), has everlasting life (such is the quickening power of His word), and shall not come into judgment. He is passed from death into life. Simple and wonderful testimony!\* The judgment will glorify the Lord in the case of those who have despised Him here. The possession of eternal life, that they may not come into judgment, is the portion of those who believe.

[\* Remark how full the bearing of this is. If they do not come into judgment to settle their state, as man would put it, they are shown to be wholly dead in sin. Grace in Christ does not contemplate an uncertain state which judgment will determine. It gives life and secures from judgment. But while He judges as Son of man according to the deeds done in the body, He shows us here that all were dead in sin to begin with.]

The Lord then points out two distinct periods, in which the power that the Father committed to Him as having come down to the earth, is to be exercised. The hour was coming — was already come — in which the dead should hear the voice of the Son of God, and those that heard should live. This is the communication of spiritual life by Jesus, the Son of God, to man, who is dead by sin, and that by means of the word which he should hear. For the Father has given to the Son, to Jesus, thus manifested on earth, to have life in Himself (compare 1 John 1:1, 2). He has also given Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of man. For the kingdom and the judgment, according to the counsels of God, belong to Him as Son of man — in that character in which He was despised and rejected when He came in grace.

This passage also shows us that, although He was the eternal Son, one with the Father, He is always looked upon as manifested here in the flesh, and, therefore, as receiving all from the Father. It is thus that we have seen Him at the well of Samaria — the God who gave, but the One who asked the poor woman to give Him to drink.

Jesus, then, quickened souls at that time. He still quickens. They were not to marvel. A work, more wonderful in the eyes of men, should be accomplished. All those that were in the grave should come forth. This is the second period of which He speaks. In the one He quickens souls; in the other, He raises up bodies from death. The one has lasted during the ministry of Jesus and 1800 years since His death; the other is not yet come, but during its continuance two things will take place. There will be a

resurrection of those who have done good (this will be a resurrection of life, the Lord will complete His quickening work), and there will be a resurrection of those who have done evil (this will be a resurrection for their judgment). This judgment will be according to the mind of God, and not according to any separate personal will of Christ. Thus far it is sovereign power, and as regards life sovereign Grace — He quickens whom He will. What follows is man's responsibility as regards the obtaining eternal life. It was there in Jesus, and they would not come to Him to have it.

The Lord goes on to point out to them four testimonies rendered to His glory and to His Person, which left them without excuse: John, His own works, His Father, and the scriptures. Nevertheless, while pretending to receive the latter, as finding in them eternal life, they would not come to Him that they might have life. Poor Jews! The Son came in the name of the Father, and they would not receive Him; another shall come in his own name, and him they will receive. This better suits the heart of man. They sought honor from one another: how could they believe? Let us remember this. God does not accommodate Himself to the pride of man — does not arrange the truth so as to feed it. Jesus knew the Jews. Not that He would accuse them to the Father: Moses, in whom they trusted, would do that; for if they had believed Moses, they would have believed Christ. But if they did not credit the writings of Moses, how would they believe the words of a despised Savior?

In result, the Son of God gives life, and He executes judgment. In the judgment that He executes, the testimony which had been rendered to His Person leaves man without excuse on the ground of his own responsibility. In chapter 5 Jesus is the Son of God who, with the Father, gives life, and as Son of man judges. In chapter 6 He is the object of faith, as come down from heaven and dying. He just alludes to His going on high as Son of man.

In **CHAPTER 6**, then, it is the Lord come down from heaven, humbled and put to death, not now as the Son of God, one with the Father, the source of life; but as He who, although He was Jehovah and at the same time the Prophet and the King, would take the place of Victim, and that of Priest in heaven: in His incarnation, the bread of life; dead, the true nourishment of believers; ascended again to heaven, the living object of their faith. But He

only glances at this last feature: the doctrine of the chapter is that which goes before. It is not the divine power that quickens, but the Son of man come in flesh, the object of faith, and so the means of life; and, though, as plainly declared by the calling of grace, yet it is not the divine side, quickening whom He will, but faith in us laying hold of Him. In both He acts independently of the limits of Judaism. He quickens whom He will, and comes to give life to the world.

It was on the occasion of the Passover, a type which the Lord was to fulfill by the death of which He spoke. Observe, here, that all these chapters present the Lord, and the truth that reveals Him, in contrast with Judaism, which He forsook and set aside. Chapter 5 was the impotence of the law and its ordinances; here it is the blessings promised by the Lord to the Jews on earth (Psalm 132:15), and the characters of Prophet and King fulfilled by the Messiah on earth in connection with the Jews, that are seen in contrast with the new position and the doctrine of Jesus. That of which I here speak characterises every distinct subject in this Gospel.

First, Jesus blesses the people, according to the promise of that which Jehovah should do, given them in Psalm 132, for He was Jehovah. On this, the people acknowledge Him to be “that Prophet,” and desire by force to make Him their King. But this He declines now — could not take it in this carnal way. Jesus leaves them, and goes up by Himself into a mountain. This was, figuratively, His position as Priest on high. These are the three characters of the Messiah in respect of Israel; but the last has full and special application to the saints now also, as walking on the earth, who continue as to this the position of the remnant. The disciples enter a ship, and, without Him, are tossed upon the waves. Darkness comes on (this will happen to the remnant down here), and Jesus is away. Nevertheless He rejoins them, and they receive Him joyfully. Immediately the ship is at the place to which they were going. A striking picture of the remnant journeying on earth during the absence of Christ, and their every wish fully and immediately satisfied — full blessing and rest — when He rejoins them.\*

[\* The direct application of this is to the remnant; but then, as hinted in the text, we, as to our path on earth, are, so to speak, the continuation of that remnant, and Christ is on high for us, while we are on the waves below. The subsequent part of the chapter, of the bread of life, is properly for us. The world, not Israel, is in question. Indeed though Christ is Aaron within the



veil for Israel, while He is there the saints have properly their heavenly character.]

This part of the chapter, having shown us the Lord as already the Prophet here below, and refusing to be made King, and also that which will yet take place when He returns to the remnant on earth — the historical framework of what He was and will be — the remainder of the chapter gives us that which He is meanwhile to faith, His true character, the purpose of God in sending Him, outside Israel, and in connection with sovereign grace. The people seek Him. The true work, which God owns, is to believe in Him whom He has sent. This is that meat which endures unto everlasting life, which is given by the Son of man (it is in this character we find Jesus here, as in chapter 5 it was the Son of God), for He it is whom God the Father has sealed. Jesus had taken this place of Son of man in humiliation here below. He went to be baptised of John the Baptist; and there, in this character, the Father sealed Him, the Holy Ghost coming down upon Him.

The multitude ask Him for a proof like the manna. He was Himself the proof — the true manna. Moses did not give the heavenly bread of life. Their fathers died in the very wilderness in which they had eaten the manna. The Father now gave them the true bread from heaven. Here, observe, it is not the Son of God who gives, and who is the sovereign Giver of life to whom He will. He is the object set before faith; He is to be fed upon. Life is found in Him; he that eats Him shall live by Him, and shall never hunger. But the multitude did not believe in Him; in fact, the mass of Israel, as such, were not in question. Those that the Father gave Him should come unto Him. He was there the passive object, so to say, of faith. It is no longer to whom He will, but to receive those whom the Father brought Him. Therefore, be it who it might, He would in no wise cast them out: enemy, scoffer, Gentile, they would not come if the Father had not sent them. The Messiah was there to do His Father's will, and whomsoever the Father brought Him He would receive for life eternal (compare chap. 5:21). The Father's will had these two characters. Of all whom the Father should give Him, He would lose none. Precious assurance! The Lord saves assuredly to the end those whom the Father has given Him; and then every one that should see the Son and believe on Him should have everlasting life. This is the gospel for every soul, as the other is that which infallibly assures the salvation of every believer. But this is

not all. The subject of hope was not now the fulfillment on earth of the promises made to the Jew, but being raised from the dead, having part in everlasting life — in resurrection at the last day (that is, of the age of the law in which they were). He did not crown the dispensation of the law; He was to bring in a new dispensation, and with it resurrection. The Jews\* murmur at His saying that He came down from heaven. Jesus replies by the testimony that their difficulty was easy to be understood: no one could come unto Him except the Father brought him. It was grace that produced this effect; whether they were Jews or not made no difference. It was a question of eternal life, of being raised from the dead by Him; not of performing the promises as Messiah, but of bringing in the life of a widely different world to be enjoyed by faith — the Father's grace having led the soul to find it in Jesus. Moreover, the prophets had said they should all be taught of God. Every one, therefore, who had learned of the Father came unto Him. No man, doubtless, had seen the Father excepting Him who was of God — Jesus; He had seen the Father. He that believed in Him was already in possession of eternal life, for He was the bread come down from heaven, that a man might eat thereof and not die.

[\* In John, the Jews are always distinguished from the multitude. They are the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea. It would, perhaps, be easier to understand this Gospel, if the words were rendered "those of Judea," which is the true sense.]

But this was not only by the incarnation, but by the death of Him who came down from heaven. He would give His life; His blood should be taken from the body which He had assumed. They should eat His flesh; they should drink His blood. Death should be the believer's life. And, in fact, it is in a dead Savior that we see the sin taken away which He bore for us, and death for us is death to the sinful nature in which evil and our separation from God lay. There He made an end of sin — He who knew no sin. Death, which sin brought in, puts away the sin that attached to the life, which there comes to its end. Not that Christ had any sin in His own Person; but He took sin, He was made sin, on the cross, for us. And he who is dead is justified from sin. I feed, therefore, on the death of Christ. Death is mine; it is become life. It separates me from sin, from death, from the life in which I was separated from God. In it sin and death have finished their course. They were attached to my life. Christ, in grace, has born them, and He has given His flesh for the life of the world; and I am

freed from them; and I feed on the infinite grace that is in Him, who has accomplished this. The expiation is complete, and I live, being happily dead to all that separated me from God. It is death as fulfilled in Him that I feed upon, first for me, and entering withal into it by faith. He needed to live as man in order to die, and He has given His life. Thus His death is efficacious; His love infinite; the expiation total, absolute, perfect. That which was between me and God exists no longer, for Christ died, and it all passed away with His life here on earth — life as He had it before expiring on the cross. Death could not hold Him. To perform this work, He needed to possess a power of divine life which death could not touch; but this is not the truth expressly taught in the chapter before us, although it is implied.

In speaking to the multitude, the Lord, while rebuking them for their unbelief, presents Himself, come in the flesh, as the object of their faith at that moment (v. 32-35). To the Jews, in laying open the doctrine, He repeats that He is the living bread come down from heaven, of which if any man eat he should live for ever. But He makes them understand that they could not stop there — they must receive His death. He does not say here, “he that eateth me,” but it was to eat His flesh and drink His blood, to enter fully into the thought — the reality — of His death; to receive a dead (not a living) Messiah, dead for men, dead before God. He does not exist now as a dead Christ; but we must acknowledge, realise, feed upon, His death — identify ourselves with it before God, participating in it by faith, or we have no life in us.\*

[\* This truth is of vast importance as regards the sacramental question. Sacraments are declared by the Puseyite school to be the continuation of the incarnation. This is in every respect error, and, in truth, a denial of the faith. Both sacraments signify death. We are baptised to Christ’s death; and the Lord’s supper is confessedly emblematic of His death. I say “denial of the faith”; because, as the Lord shows, if they do not eat His flesh and blood, they have no life in them. As incarnate Christ is alone. His presence in flesh on earth showed that God and sinful men could not be united. His presence as man in the world resulted in His rejection — proved the impossibility of union or fruit on that ground. Redemption must come in, His blood be shed, Himself lifted up from the earth, and so draw men to Him: death must come in, or He abode alone. They could not eat the bread unless they ate the flesh and drank the blood. A meat-offering without a bloody offering was null, or rather a Cain offering. Further, the Lord’s supper presents a dead Christ, and a dead Christ only — the blood apart from the body. No such Christ exists; and therefore transubstantiation and consubstantiation and all

such thoughts are a blundering fable. We are united to a glorified Christ by the Holy Ghost; and we celebrate that most precious death upon which all our blessing is founded, through which we got there. We do it in remembrance of Him, and in our hearts feed on Him, so given, and shedding His blood.]

Thus it was for the world. Thus they should live, not of their own life, but by Christ, through feeding on Him. Here He returns to His own Person, faith in His death being established. Moreover, they should dwell in Him (v. 56) should be in Him before God, according to all His acceptance before God, all the efficacy of His work in dying.\* And Christ should dwell in them according to the power and grace of that life in which He had gained the victory over death, and in which, having gained it, He now lives. As the living Father had sent Him, and He lived, not by an independent life which had not the Father for its object or source, but by reason of the Father, so he that thus ate Him should live because of Him.\*\*

[\* Abiding imports constancy of dependence, confidence, and living by the life in which Christ lives. "Dwelling" and "abiding," though the word be changed in English, are the same in the original: so in chapter 15 and elsewhere.]

[\*\* It may be well to note that in the Greek in this passage, in verses 51 and 53, eating is in the aorist tense — whosoever has done so. In verses 54, 56 and 57, it is the present tense — a present continuous action.]

Afterwards, in reply to those who murmured at this fundamental truth, the Lord appeals to His ascension. He had come down from heaven — this was His doctrine; He would ascend thither again. Material flesh profited nothing. It was the Spirit who gave life, by realising in the soul the mighty truth of that which Christ was, and of His death. But He returns to that which He had told them before; in order to come to Him thus revealed in truth, they must be led of the Father. There is such a thing as faith that is ignorant perhaps, although through grace real. Such was that of the disciples. They knew that He, and He only, had the words of eternal life. It was not only that He was the Messiah, which they indeed believed, but His words had laid hold of their hearts with the power of the divine life which they revealed, and through grace communicated. Thus they acknowledged Him as the Son of God, not only officially, so to speak, but according to the power of divine life. He was the Son of the living God. Nevertheless there was one among them who was of the devil.

Jesus therefore, come down to earth, put to death, ascending again to heaven, is the doctrine of this chapter. As come down and put to death, He is the food of faith during His absence on high. For it is on His death we must feed, in order to dwell spiritually in Him and He in us.

In **CHAPTER 7** His brethren after the flesh, still sunk in unbelief, would have Him show Himself to the world, if He did these great things; but the time for this was not yet come. At the fulfillment of the type of the feast of tabernacles He will do so. The passover had its antitype at the cross, pentecost at the descent of the Holy Ghost. The feast of tabernacles, as yet, has had no fulfillment. It was celebrated after the harvest and the vintage, and Israel joyfully commemorated, in the land, their pilgrimage before entering on the rest which God had given them in Canaan. Thus the fulfillment of this type will be when, after the execution of judgment (whether in discerning between the wicked and the good, or simply in vengeance\*), Israel, restored to their land, shall be in possession of all their promised blessing. At that time Jesus will show Himself to the world; but at the time of which we are speaking His hour was not yet come. Meanwhile, having gone away (v. 33, 34), He gives the Holy Ghost to believers (v. 38, 39).

[\* The harvest is discriminating judgment, there are tares and wheat. The winepress is the destructive judgment of vengeance. In the former there will be two in one bed, one taken and another left, but the winepress is simple wrath, as Isaiah 63. So in Revelation 14.]

Remark here, there is no pentecost brought in. We pass from the passover in chapter 6 to the tabernacles in chapter 7, in lieu of which believers would receive the Holy Ghost. As I have remarked, this Gospel treats of a divine Person on earth, not of the man in heaven. The coming of the Holy Ghost is spoken of as substituted for the last or eighth day of the feast of tabernacles. Pentecost supposes Jesus on high.

But He presents the Holy Ghost in such a way as to make Him the hope of faith at the time in which He spoke, if God created a sense of need in the soul. If any one thirsted, let him come to Jesus and drink. Not only should his thirst be quenched, but from the inner man of his soul should flow forth streams of living water. So that coming to Him by faith to satisfy the need of their soul, not only should the Holy Ghost be in them a well of water springing up into everlasting life, but living water should also

flow forth from them in abundance to refresh all those who thirsted. Observe here, that Israel drank water in the wilderness before they could keep the feast of tabernacles. But they only drank. There was no well in them. The water flowed from the rock. Under grace every believer is not doubtless a source in himself; but the full stream flows from him. This however would only take place when Jesus was glorified, and in those who were already believers, previous to their receiving it. What is spoken of here is not a work that quickens. It is a gift to those who believe. Moreover at the feast of tabernacles Jesus will show Himself to the world; but this is not the subject of which the Holy Ghost thus received is especially the witness. He is given in connection with the glory of Jesus, while He is hidden from the world. It was also on the eighth day of the feast, the sign of a portion beyond the sabbath rest of this world, and which began another period — a new scene of glory.

Observe also that, practically, although the Holy Ghost is presented here as power acting in blessing outside the one in whom He dwells, His presence in the believer is the fruit of a personal thirst, of need felt in the soul — need for which the soul had sought an answer in Christ. He who thirsts, thirsts for himself. The Holy Ghost in us, revealing Christ, becomes, by dwelling in us when we have believed, a river in us, and thus for others.

The spirit of the Jews plainly showed itself. They sought to kill the Lord; and He tells them that His relationship with them on earth would soon be ended (v. 33). They need not hasten so much to get rid of Him: soon they would seek Him and not be able to find Him. He was going away to His Father.

We see clearly the difference here between the multitude and the Jews — two parties always distinguished from each other in this Gospel. The former did not understand why He spoke of the desire to kill Him. Those of Judea were astonished at His boldness, knowing that at Jerusalem they were conspiring against His life. His time was not yet come. They send officers to take Him; and these return, struck with His discourse, without laying hands on Him. The Pharisees are angry, and express their contempt for the people. Nicodemus hazards a word of justice according to the law, and brings their contempt on himself But each one goes away to his home.

Jesus, who had no home until He went back to heaven whence He came, goes to the Mount of Olives, the witness of His agony, His ascension, and His return — a place which He habitually frequented, when at Jerusalem, during the time of His ministry on earth.

The contrast of this chapter with Judaism, even with its best hopes in the future that God has prepared for His earthly people, is too evident to be dwelt upon. This Gospel, throughout, reveals Jesus outside all that belonged to that earthly system. In chapter 6 it was death here below on the cross. Here it is glory in heaven, the Jews being rejected, and the Holy Ghost given to the believer. In chapter 5 He gives life, as the Son of God; in chapter 6 He is the same Son, but not as divinely quickening and judging as being Son of man, but as come down from heaven, the Son in humiliation here, but the true bread from heaven which the Father gave. But in that lowly One, they must see the Son, to live. Then, as so come, and having taken the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, He (v. 53) humbles Himself, and suffers on the cross, as Son of man; in chapter 7 He, when glorified, sends the Holy Ghost. Chapter 5 displays His titles of personal glory; chapters 6, 7, His work and the giving of the Spirit to believers consequent on His present glory in heaven,\* to which the presence of the Holy Ghost answers on earth. In chapters 8, 9\*\* we shall find His testimony and His works rejected, and the question decided between Him and the Jews. It will be observed also, that chapters 5 and 6 treat of the life. In chapter 5 it is given sovereignly and divinely by Him who possesses it; in chapter 6, the soul, receiving and being occupied with Jesus by faith, finds life, and feeds upon Him by the grace of the Father: two things distinct in their nature — God gives; man, by grace, feeds. On the other hand, chapter 7 is Christ's going to Him that sent Him, and meanwhile the Holy Ghost, who unfolds the glory He is gone into, in us and by us, in its heavenly character. In chapter 5 Christ is the Son of God, who quickens in abstract divine power and will, what He is, not the place He is in, but alone judges, being Son of man; in chapter 6, the same Son, but come down from heaven, the object of faith in His humiliation, then the Son of man, dying, and returning again; in chapter 7, not yet revealed to the world. The Holy Ghost is given instead when He is glorified above, the Son of man in heaven — at least contemplating His going there.

[\* This glory, however, is only supposed, not taught. He cannot be at the feast of tabernacles, Israel's rest, nor show Himself, as He will then, to the world; but gives the Holy Ghost instead. This we know supposes His present position, just referred to in chapter 6.]

[\*\* The doctrine of chapter 9 continues to the 30th verse of chapter 10.]

In **CHAPTER 8**, as we have said, the word of Jesus is rejected; and, in chapter 9, His works. But there is much more than that. The personal glories of chapter 1 are reproduced and developed in all these chapters separately (leaving out for the moment from verse 36 to 51 of chapter 1): we have found again the verses 14-34 in chapters 5, 6, and 7. The Holy Ghost now returns to the subject of the first verses in the chapter. Christ is the Word; He is the life, and the life which is the light of men. The three chapters that I have now pointed out speak of what He is in grace for men, while still declaring His right to judge. The Spirit here (in chap. 8) sets before us that which He is in Himself, and that which He is to men (thus putting them to the test, so that in rejecting Him they reject themselves, and show themselves to be reprobate).

Let us now consider our chapter. The contrast with Judaism is evident. They bring a woman whose guilt is undeniable. The Jews, in their wickedness, bring her forward in the hope of confounding the Lord. If He condemned her, He was not a Savior — the law could do as much. If He let her go, He despised and disallowed the law. This was clever; but what avails cleverness in the presence of God who searches the heart? The Lord allows them to commit themselves thoroughly by not answering them for awhile. Probably they thought He was entangled. At last He says, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast the stone." Convicted by their conscience, without honesty and without faith, they quit the scene of their confusion, separating from each other, each caring for himself, caring for character not conscience, and departing from Him who had convicted them; he who had the most reputation to save going out first. What a sorrowful picture! What a mighty word! Jesus and the woman are left together alone. Who can stand unconvicted in His presence? With regard to the woman, whose guilt was known, He does not go beyond the Jewish position, except to preserve the rights of His own Person in grace.

This is not the same thing as in Luke 7, plenary pardon and salvation. The others could not condemn her — He would not. Let her go, and let her sin



no more. It is not the grace of salvation that the Lord exhibits here. He does not judge, He was not come for this; but the efficacy of the pardon is not the subject of these chapters — it is the glory here of His Person, in contrast with all that is of the law. He is the light, and by the power of His word He entered as light into the conscience of those who had brought the woman.

For the Word was light; but that was not all. Coming into the world, He was (chap. 1:4-10) the light. Now it was the life that was the light of men. It was not a law that made demands, and condemned; or that promised life on obedience to its precepts. It was the Life itself which was there in His Person, and that life was the light of men, convincing them, and, perhaps, judging them; but it was as light. Thus Jesus says herein contrast with the law, brought by those who could not stand before the light — "I am the light of the world" (not merely of the Jews). For in this Gospel we have what Christ is essentially in His Person, whether as God, the Son come from the Father, or Son of man — not what God was in special dealings with the Jews. Hence He was the object of faith in His Person, not in dispensational dealings. Whoso followed Him should have the light of life. But it was in Him, in His Person, that it was found. And He could bear record of Himself, because, although He was a man there, in this world, He knew whence He came and whither He was going. It was the Son, who came from the Father and was returning to Him again. He knew it, and was conscious of it. His testimony, therefore, was not that of an interested person which one might hesitate to believe. There was, in proof that this man was the One whom He represented Himself to be, the testimony of the Son (His own), and the testimony of the Father. If they had known Him, they would have known the Father.

At that time — in spite of such testimony as this — no one laid hands on Him: His hour was not yet come. That only was wanting; for their opposition to God was certain, and known to Him. This opposition was plainly declared (v. 19-24); consequently, if they believed not, they would die in their sins. Nevertheless He tells them that they shall know who He is, when He shall have been rejected and lifted up on the cross, having taken a very different position as the Savior, rejected by the people and unknown of the world; when no longer presented to them as such, they should know that He was indeed the Messiah, and that He was the Son

who spoke to them from the Father. As He spake these words, many believed on Him. He declares to them the effect of faith, which gives occasion to the true position of the Jews being manifested with terrible precision. He declares that the truth would set them free, and that if the Son (who is the truth) should set them free, they would be free indeed. The truth sets free morally before God. The Son, by virtue of the rights that were necessarily His, and by inheritance in the house, would place them in it according to those rights, and that in the power of divine life come down from heaven — the Son of God with power as resurrection declared it. In this was the true setting free.

Piqued at the idea of bondage, which their pride could not bear, they declare themselves to be free, and never to have been in bondage to any one. In reply, the Lord shows that those who commit sin are the servants (slaves) of sin. Now, as being under the law, as being Jews, they were servants in the house: they should be sent away. But the Son had inalienable rights; He was of the house and would abide in it for ever. Under sin, and under the law, was the same thing for a child of Adam; he was a servant. The apostle shows this in Romans 6 (compare chaps. 7 and 8) and in Galatians 4 and 5. Moreover, they were neither really, nor morally, the children of Abraham before God, although they were so according to the flesh; for they sought to kill Jesus. They were not children of God; had they been, they would have loved Jesus who came from God. They were the children of the devil and would do his works.

Observe here, that to understand the meaning of the word is the way to apprehend the force of the words. One does not learn the definition of words and then the things; one learns the things, and then the meaning of the words is evident.

They begin to resist the testimony, conscious that He was making Himself greater than all those whom they had leant upon. They rail upon Him because of His words; and by their opposition the Lord is induced to explain Himself more clearly; until, having declared that Abraham rejoiced to see His day, and the Jews applying this to His age as man, He announces positively that He is the One who calls Himself I am — the supreme name of God, that He is God Himself — He whom they pretended to know as having revealed Himself in the bush.

Wondrous revelation! A despised, rejected man, despised and rejected by men, contradicted, ill-treated, yet it was God Himself who was there. What a fact! What a total change! What a revelation to those who acknowledged Him, or who know Him! What a condition is theirs who have rejected Him, and that because their hearts were opposed to all that He was, for He did not fail to manifest Himself! What a thought, that God Himself has been here! Goodness itself! How everything vanishes before Him! — the law, man, his reasonings. Everything necessarily depends on this great fact. And, blessed be His name! this God is a Savior. We are indebted to the sufferings of Christ for knowing it. And note here, how the setting aside formal dispensations from God, if true, is by the revelation of Himself, and so introduces infinitely greater blessing.

But here He presents Himself as the Witness, the Word, the Word made flesh, the Son of God, but still the Word, God Himself. In the narrative at the beginning of the chapter He is a testimony to the conscience, the Word that searches and convicts. Verse 18, He bears testimony with the Father. Verse 26, He declares in the world that which He has received of the Father, and as taught of God He has spoken. Moreover the Father was with Him. Verses 32, 33, the truth was known by His word, and the truth made them free. Verse 47, He spoke the words of God. Verse 51, His word, being kept, preserved from death. Verse 58, it was God Himself, the Jehovah whom the fathers knew, that spoke.

Opposition arose from its being the word of truth (v. 45). Opposers were of the adversary. He was a murderer from the beginning, and they would follow him; but as the truth was the source of life, so that which characterised the adversary was, that he abode not in the truth: there is no truth in him. He is the father and the source of lies, so that, if falsehood speaks, it is one belonging to him that speaks. Sin was bondage, and they were in bondage by the law. (Truth, the Son Himself, made free.) But, more than that, the Jews were enemies, children of the enemy, and they would do his works, not believing the words of Christ because He spoke the truth. There is no miracle here; it is the power of the word, and the living word is God Himself: rejected by men, He is, as it were, compelled to speak the truth, to reveal Himself, hidden at once and manifested, as He was in the flesh — hidden as to His glory, manifested as to all that He is in His Person and in His grace.

In **CHAPTER 9** we come to the testimony of His works, but as down here as a man in lowliness. It is not the Son of God quickening whom He will as the Father, but by the operation of His grace down here, the eye opened to see in the lowly man the Son of God. In chapter 8 it is that which He is towards men; in chapter 9 it is that which He does in man, that man may see Him. Thus we shall find Him presented in His human character, and (the word being received) acknowledged to be the Son of God; and in this way the remnant separated, the sheep restored to the good Shepherd. He is the light of the world while He is in it; but where, through grace received in His humiliation, He communicated the power to see the light, and to see all things by it.

Observe here, that when it is the word (the manifestation in testimony of what Christ is), man is manifested as he is in himself, a child — in his nature — of the devil, who is a murderer and a liar from the beginning, the inveterate enemy of Him who can say, “I am.”\* But when the Lord works, He produces something in man that he had not previously. He bestows sight on him, attaching him thus to the One who had enabled him to see. The Lord is not here understood or manifested in apparently as exalted a manner, because He comes down to the wants and circumstances of man, in order that He may be more closely known; but, in result, He brings the soul to the knowledge of His glorious Person. Only, instead of being the word and the testimony — the Word of God — to show as light what man is, He is the Son, one with the Father,\*\* giving eternal life to His sheep, and preserving them in this grace for ever. For, as to the blessing that flows from thence, and the full doctrine of His true position with regard to the sheep in blessing, chapter 10 goes with chapter 9. Chapter 10 is the continuation of the discourse begun at the end of chapter 9.

[\* Chapter 8 is practically chapter 1:5; only that there is, besides that, enmity, hostility against Him who was light.]

[\*\* This distinction of grace and responsibility (in connection with the names Father and Son, and God) has been already noticed. See page 316.]

**CHAPTER 9** opens with the case of a man that gives rise to a question from the disciples, in relation to the government of God in Israel. Was it his parents’ sin that brought this visitation on their child, according to the principles God had given them in Exodus? Or was it his own sin, known to God though not manifested to men, that had procured him this judgment?

The Lord replies, that the man's condition did not depend on the government of God with respect to the sin either of himself or of his parents. His case was but the misery which gave room for the mighty operation of God in grace. It is the contrast that we have continually seen; but here it is in order to set forth the works of God.

God acts. It is not only that which He is, nor even simply an object of faith. The presence of Jesus on earth made it day. It was therefore the time of work to do the works of Him that sent Him. But He who works here, works by means that teach us the union which exists between an object of faith and the power of God who works. He makes clay with His spittle and the earth, and puts it on the eyes of the man who was born blind. As a figure, it pointed to the humanity of Christ in earthly humiliation and lowliness, presented to the eyes of men, but with divine efficacy of life in Him. Did they see any more? If possible, their eyes were the more completely closed. Still the object was there; it touched their eyes, and they could not see it. The blind man then washes in the pool that was called "Sent," and is enabled to see clearly. The power of the Spirit and of the word, making Christ known as the One sent by the Father, gives him sight. It is the history of divine teaching in the heart of man. Christ, as man, touches us. We are absolutely blind, we see nothing. The Spirit of God acts, Christ being there before our eyes; and we see plainly.

The people are astonished and know not what to think. The Pharisees oppose. Again the Sabbath is in question. They find (it is always the story) good reasons for condemning Him who bestowed sight, in their pretended zeal for God's glory. There was positive proof that the man was born blind, that he now saw, that Jesus had done it. The parents testify to the only thing that was important on their part. As to who it was that had given him sight, others knew more than they; but their fears bring out in evidence, that it was a settled thing to cast out, not only Jesus, but all who should confess Him. Thus the Jewish leaders brought the thing to a decisive point. They not only rejected Christ, but they cast out from the privileges of Israel, as to their ordinary worship, those who confessed Him. Their hostility distinguished the manifested remnant and put them apart; and that, by using confession of Christ as a touchstone. This was deciding their own fate, and judging their own condition.

Observe, that proofs here went for nothing; the Jews, the parents, the Pharisees, had them before their eyes. Faith came through being personally the subject of this mighty operation of God, who opened the eyes of men to the glory of the Lord Jesus. Not that the man understood it all. He perceives that he has to do with some one sent of God. To him Jesus is a prophet. But thus the power which He had manifested in giving sight to this man enables him to trust the Lord's word as divine. Having gone so far, the rest is easy: the poor man is led much farther, and finds himself on ground that sets him free from all his former prejudices, and that gives a value to the Person of Jesus which overcomes all other considerations. The Lord develops this in the next chapter.

In truth, the Jews had made up their mind. They would have nothing to do with Jesus. They were all agreed to cast out those who believed in Him. Consequently, the poor man having begun to reason with them on the proof that existed in his own person of the Savior's mission, they cast him out. Thus cast out, the Lord — rejected before him — finds and reveals Himself to him by His personal name of glory. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" The man refers it to the word of Jesus, which to him was divine truth, and He proclaims Himself to him as being Himself the Son of God, and the man worships Him.

Thus the effect of His power was to blind those who saw, who were full of their own wisdom, whose light was darkness; and to give sight to those who were born blind.

In **CHAPTER 10** He contrasts Himself with all those who pretended, or had pretended, to be shepherds of Israel. He develops these three points; He comes in by the door; He is the door; and He is the Shepherd of the sheep — the good Shepherd.

He comes in by the door. That is to say, He submits to all the conditions established by Him who built the house. Christ answers to all that is written of the Messiah, and takes the path of God's will in presenting Himself to the people. It is not human energy and power awakening and attracting the passions of men; but the obedient man who bowed to Jehovah's will, kept the lowly place of a servant, and lived by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God, bowed in lowliness to the place in which Jehovah's judgment had placed and viewed Israel. All the Lord's

quotations in His conflict with Satan are from Deuteronomy.

Consequently He who watches over the sheep, Jehovah, acting in Israel by His Spirit and providence, and arranging all things, gives Him access to the sheep in spite of the Pharisees and priests and so many others. The elect of Israel hear His voice. Now Israel was under condemnation: He therefore brings the sheep out, but He goes before them. He leaves that ancient fold, under reproach doubtless, but going before His sheep, in obedience according to the power of God — a security to every one who believed in Him that it was the right road, a warrant for their following Him, come what might, meeting every danger and showing them the way.

The sheep follow Him, for they know His voice. There are many other voices, but the sheep do not know them. Their safety consists, not in knowing them all, but in knowing that they are not the one voice which is life to them — the voice of Jesus. All the rest are the voices of strangers.

He is the door for the sheep. He is their authority for going out, their means of entering in. By entering in, they are saved. They go in and out. It is no longer the yoke of ordinances, which, in guarding them from those without, put them in prison. The sheep of Christ are free: their safety is in the personal care of the Shepherd; and in this liberty they feed in the good and fat pastures which His love supplies. In a word, it is no longer Judaism; it is salvation, and liberty, and food. The thief comes to make his profit on the sheep by killing them. Christ is come that they might have life, and that abundantly; that is, according to the power of this life in Jesus, the Son of God, who would soon have this life (whose power was in His Person) in resurrection beyond death.

The true Shepherd of Israel — at least of the remnant of the sheep — the door to authorise their coming out of the Jewish fold, and to admit them into the privileges of God by giving them life according to the abundance in which He was able to bestow it — He was also in special connection with the sheep thus set apart, the good Shepherd who thus gave His life for the sheep. Others would think of themselves, He of His sheep. He knew them, and they knew Him, even as the Father knew Him, and He knew the Father. Precious principle! They could have understood an earthly knowledge and interest on the part of the Messiah on earth with regard to

His sheep. But the Son, although He had given His life and was in heaven, knows His own, even as the Father knew Him when He was on the earth.

Thus He laid down His life for the sheep; and He had other sheep who were not of this fold, and His death intervened for the salvation of these poor Gentiles. He would call them. Doubtless He had given His life for the Jews also — for all the sheep in general, as such (v. 11). But He does not speak distinctly of the Gentiles until after He has spoken of His death. He would bring them also, and there should be but one flock and one Shepherd (not “one fold,” there is no fold now).

Now this doctrine teaches the rejection of Israel, and the calling out of the elect among that people, presents the death of Jesus as being the effect of His love for His own, tells of His divine knowledge of His sheep when He shall be away from them, and of the call of the Gentiles. The importance of such instruction at that moment is obvious. Its importance, thank God! is not lost by the lapse of time, and is not limited to the fact of a change of dispensation. It introduces us into the substantial realities of the grace connected with the Person of Christ. But the death of Christ was more than love for His sheep. It had an intrinsic value in the Father’s eyes. “Therefore doth the Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again.” He does not say here for His sheep — it is the thing itself that is well-pleasing to the Father. We love because God has first loved us, but Jesus, the divine Son, can furnish motives for the Father’s love. In laying down His life, He glorified the Father. Death was owned to be the just penalty for sin (being at the same time annulled and he who had the power of it, 2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:14), and eternal life brought in as the fruit of redemption — life from God. Here also the rights of the Person of Christ are set forth. No man takes His life from Him: He lays it down Himself. He had this power (possessed by no other, true only of Him who had divine right) to lay it down, and power to take it again. Nevertheless, even in this, He did not depart from the path of obedience. He had received this commandment from His Father. But who would have been able to perform it save He who could say, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again”?\*

[\* Love and obedience are the governing principles of divine life. This is unfolded in the First Epistle of John as to ourselves. Another mark of it in the creature is dependence, and this was fully manifested in Jesus as man.]



They discuss what He had been saying. There were some who only saw in Him a man beside himself, and who insulted Him. Others, moved by the power of the miracle He had performed, felt that His words had a different character from that of madness. To a certain point their consciences were reached. The Jews surround Him, and ask how long He would keep them in suspense. Jesus answers that He had already told them; and that His works bore Him testimony. He appeals to the two testimonies which we have seen brought forward in the previous chapter (8 and 9); namely, His word and His works. But He adds, they were not of His sheep. He then takes occasion, without noticing their prejudices, to add some precious truths respecting His sheep. They hear His voice; He knows them; they follow Him; He gives them eternal life; they shall never perish. On the one hand, there shall be no perishing of life as within; on the other, no one shall pluck them out of the Savior's hand — force from without shall not overcome the power of Him who keeps them. But there is another and an infinitely precious truth which the Lord in His love reveals to us. The Father had given us to Jesus, and He is greater than all who would seek to pluck us out of His hand. And Jesus and the Father are one. Precious teaching! in which the glory of the Person of the Son of God is identified with the safety of His sheep, with the height and depth of the love of which they are the objects. Here it is not a testimony which, as altogether divine, sets forth what man is. It is the work and the efficacious love of the Son, and at the same time that of the Father. It is not "I am"; but "I and the Father are one." If the Son has accomplished the work, and takes care of the sheep, it was the Father who gave them to Him. The Christ may perform a divine work, and furnish a motive for the Father's love, but it was the Father who gave it Him to do. Their love to the sheep is one, as those who bear that love are one.

**CHAPTER 8**, therefore, is the manifestation of God in testimony, and as light; chapters 9 and 10, the efficacious grace which gathers the sheep under the care of the Son, and of the Father's love. John speaks of God when he speaks of a holy nature, and man's responsibility — of the Father and the Son, when he speaks of grace in connection with the people of God.

Observe, that the wolf may come and catch\* the sheep, if the shepherds are hirelings; but he cannot catch\* them out of the Savior's hands.

[\* The words catcheth and pluck in verses 12, 28 and 29 are the same in the original.]

At the end of the chapter, the Jews having taken up stones to stone Him, because He made Himself equal with God, the Lord does not seek to prove to them the truth of what He is, but shows that, according to their own principles and the testimony of the scriptures, they were wrong in this case. He appeals again to His own words and works, as proving that He was in the Father and the Father in Him. Again they take up stones, and Jesus definitely leaves them. It was all over with Israel.

**CHAPTER 11.** We come now to the testimony which the Father renders to Jesus in answer to His rejection. In this chapter the power of resurrection and of life in His own Person are presented to faith.\* But here it is not simply that He is rejected: man is looked upon as dead, and Israel also. For it is man in the person of Lazarus. This family was blessed; it received the Lord into its bosom. Lazarus falls sick. All the Lord's human affections would be naturally concerned. Martha and Mary feel this; and they send Him word that he whom He loved was sick. But Jesus stays where He is. He might have said the word, as in the case of the centurion, and of the sick child at the beginning of this Gospel. But He did not. He had manifested His power and His goodness in healing man as he is found on earth, and delivering him from the enemy, and that in the midst of Israel. But this was not His object here — far from it — or the limits of what He was come to do. It was a question of bestowing life, or raising up again that which was dead before God. This was the real state of Israel; it was the state of man. Therefore He allows the condition of man under sin to go on and manifest itself in all the intensity of its effects down here, and permits the enemy to exercise his power to the end. Nothing remained but the judgment of God; and death, in itself, convicted man of sin while conducting him to judgment. The sick may be healed — there is no remedy for death. All is over for man, as man here below. Nothing remains but the judgment of God. It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment. The Lord therefore does not heal in this instance. He allows the evil to go on to the end — to death. That was the true place of man. Lazarus once fallen asleep, He goes to awaken him. The disciples fear the Jews, and with reason. But the Lord, having waited for His Father's will, does not fear to accomplish it. It was day to Him.

[\* It is very striking to see the Lord in the lowliness of obedient service, allowing evil to have its full way in man's failure (death) and Satan's power, till His Father's will called Him to meet it. Then no danger hinders, and then He is the resurrection and the life in personal presence and power, and then giving Himself — being such, up to death for us.]

In fact, whatever might be His love for the nation, He must needs let it die (indeed it was dead), and wait for the time appointed by God to raise it up again. If He must die Himself to accomplish it, He commits Himself to His Father.

But let us follow out the depths of this doctrine. Death has come in; it must take effect. Man is really in death before God; but God in grace comes in. Two things are presented in our history. He might have healed. The faith and hope of neither Martha, Mary, nor the Jews, went any farther. Only Martha acknowledges that, as the Messiah, favored of God, He would obtain from Him whatsoever He asked. But He had not prevented the death of Lazarus. He had done so many times, even for strangers, for whosoever desired it. In the second place, Martha knew that her brother would rise again at the last day; but true as it was, this truth availed nothing. Who would answer for man, dead through judgment on sin? To rise again and appear before God was not an answer to death come in by sin. The two things were true. Christ had often delivered mortal man from his sufferings in flesh, and there shall be a resurrection at the last day. But these things were of no value in the presence of death. Christ was, however, there; and He is, thanks be to God! the resurrection and the life. Man being dead, resurrection comes first. But Jesus is the resurrection and the life in the present power of a divine life. And observe that life, coming by resurrection, delivers from all that death implies, and leaves it behind\* sin, death, all that belongs to the life that man has lost. Christ, having died for our sins, has born their punishment — has born them. He has died. All the power of the enemy, all its effect on mortal man, all the judgment of God, He has born it all, and has come up from it, in the power of a new life in resurrection, which is imparted to us; so that we are in spirit alive from among the dead, as He is alive from among the dead. Sin (as made sin, and bearing our sins in His own body on the tree), death, Satan's power, God's judgment, are all past through and left behind, and man is in a wholly new state, in incorruption. It will be true of us, if we die (for we shall not all die), as to the body, or, being changed, if we do not die. But in the

communication of His life who is risen from the dead, God has quickened us with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses.

[\* Christ took human life in grace and sinless; and as alive in this life He took sin upon Him. Sin belongs, so to speak, to this life in which Christ knew no sin, but was made sin for us. But He dies — He quits this life. He is dead to sin; He has done with sin in having done with the life to which sin belonged, not in Him indeed but in us, and alive in which He was made sin for us. Raised up again by the power of God, He lives in a new condition, into which sin cannot enter, being left behind with the life that He left. Faith brings us into it by grace. — It has been pretended that these thoughts affect the divine and eternal life which was in Christ. But this is all idle and evil cavil. Even in an unconverted sinner, dying or laying down life has nothing to do with ceasing to exist as to the life of the man within. All live to God, and divine life in Christ never could cease or be changed. He never laid that down, but in the power of that, laid down His life as He possessed it here as man, to take it up in an entirely new way in resurrection beyond the grave. The cavil is a very evil cavil. In this edition I have changed nothing in this note, but have added a few words in the hope that it may be clear to all. The doctrine itself is vital truth. In the text I have erased or altered a part for another reason, namely, that there was confusion between the divine power of life in Christ, and God's raising Him viewed as a dead man from the grave. Both are true and blessedly so, but they are different and were here confounded together. In Ephesians Christ as man is raised by God. In John it is the divine and quickening power in Himself.]

Jesus here manifested His own divine power to this effect; the Son of God was glorified in it, for we know He had not yet died for sin; but it was this same power in Him that was manifested.\* The believer, even if he were dead, shall rise again; and the living who believe in Him shall not die. Christ has overcome death; the power for this was in His Person, and the Father bore Him witness of it. Are any that are His alive when the Lord exercises this power? They will never die — death exists no more in His presence. Have any died before He exercises it? They shall live — death cannot subsist before Him. All the effect of sin upon man is completely destroyed by resurrection, viewed as the power of life in Christ. This refers of course to the saints, to whom life is communicated. The same divine power is, of course, exercised as to the wicked; but it is not the communication of life from Christ, nor being raised with Him, as is evident.\*\*

[\* Resurrection has a double character: divine power, which He could exercise and did exercise as to Himself (chap. 2:19), and here as to Lazarus, both the proof of divine sonship; and the deliverance of a dead man from his state of death. Thus God raised Christ from the dead, so here Christ raises Lazarus. In Christ's resurrection both were united in His own Person. Here, of course, they were separate. But Christ has life in Himself and that in divine power.

But He laid down His life in grace. We are quickened together with Him in Ephesians 2. But it seems avoided saying, He was quickened, when speaking of Him alone in chapter 1.]

[\*\* The cavil I have referred to in the note to page 345 sanctions (most unwittingly, I gladly admit) the pestiferous doctrine of annihilation, as if laying down life, or death, that is the end of natural life, were ceasing to exist. I notice it, because this form of evil doctrine is one very current now. It subverts the whole substance of Christianity.]

Christ exercised this power in obedience and in dependence on His Father, because He was man, walking before God to do His will; but He is the resurrection and the life. He has brought the power of divine life into the midst of death; and death is annihilated by it, for in life death is no more. Death was the end of natural life to sinful man. Resurrection is the end of death, which has thus no longer anything in us. It is our advantage that, having done all it could do, it is finished. We live in the life\* that put an end to it. We come out from all that could be connected with a life that no longer exists. What a deliverance! Christ is this power. He became this for us in its full display and exercise in His resurrection.

[\* Observe the sense which the apostle had of the power of this life, when he says, "That mortality might be swallowed up of life." Consider, in this point of view, the first five chapters of 2 Corinthians.]

Martha, while loving Him and believing in Him, does not understand this; and she calls Mary, feeling that her sister would better understand the Lord. We will speak a little of these two presently. Mary, who waited for the Lord's own calling her to Him, modestly though sorrowfully leaving the initiative with Him, believing thus that the Lord had called her, goes to Him directly. Jews and Martha and Mary all had seen miracles and healings that had arrested the power of death. To this they all refer. But here life had passed away. What now could help? If He had been there, His love and power they could have counted on. Mary falls down at His feet weeping. On the point of resurrection power she understood no more than Martha; but her heart is melted under the sense of death in the presence of Him who had life. It is an expression of need and sorrow rather than a complaint that she utters. The Jews also weep: the power of death was on their hearts. Jesus enters into it in sympathy. He was troubled in spirit. He sighs before God, He weeps with man; but His tears turn into a groan, which was, though inarticulate, the weight of death, felt in sympathy, and

presented to God by this groan of love which fully realised the truth; and that in love to those who were suffering the ill that His groan expressed.

He bore death before God in His spirit as the misery of man — the yoke from which man could not deliver himself, and He is heard. The need brings His power into action. It was not His part now patiently to explain to Martha what He was. He feels and acts upon the need to which Mary had given expression, her heart being opened by the grace that was in Him.

Man may sympathise: it is the expression of his powerlessness. Jesus enters into the affliction of mortal man, puts Himself under the burden of death that weighs upon man (and that more thoroughly than man himself can do), but He takes it away with its cause. He does more than take it away; He brings in the power that is able to take it away. This is the glory of God. When Christ is present, if we die, we do not die for death, but for life: we die that we may live in the life of God, instead of in the life of man. And wherefore? That the Son of God may be glorified. Death came in by sin; and man is under the power of death. But this has only given room for our possessing life according to the second Adam, the Son of God, and not according to the first Adam, the sinful man. This is grace. God is glorified in this work of grace, and it is the Son of God whose glory shines brightly forth in this divine work.

And, observe, that this is not grace offered in testimony, it is the exercise of the power of life. Corruption itself is no hindrance to God. Why did Christ come? To bring the words of eternal life to dead man. Now Mary fed upon those words. Martha served — cumbered her heart with many things. She believed, she loved Jesus, she received Him into her house: the Lord loved her. Mary listened to Him: this was what He came for; and He had justified her in it. The good part which she had chosen should not be taken from her.

When the Lord arrives, Martha goes of her own accord to meet Him. She withdraws when Jesus speaks to her of the present power of life. We are ill at ease when, although Christians, we feel unable to apprehend the meaning of the Lord's words, or of what His people say to us. Martha felt that this was rather Mary's part than hers. She goes away and calls her sister, saying, that the Master (He who taught — observe this name that she gives Him) was come, and called for her. It was her own conscience

that was to her the voice of Christ. Mary instantly arises and comes to Him. She understood no more than Martha. Her heart pours out its need at the feet of Jesus, where she had heard His words and learnt His love and grace; and Jesus asks the way to the grave. To Martha, ever occupied with circumstances, her brother stank already.

Afterwards (Martha served, and Lazarus was present), Mary anoints the Lord, in the instinctive sense of what was going on; for they were consulting to put Him to death. Her heart, taught by love to the Lord, felt the enmity of the Jews; and her affection, stimulated by deep gratitude, expends on Him the most costly thing she had. Those present blame her; Jesus again takes her part. It might not be reasonable, but she had apprehended His position. What a lesson! What a blessed family was this at Bethany, in which the heart of Jesus found (as far as could be on earth) a relief that His love accepted! With what love have we to do! Alas, with what hatred! for we see in this Gospel the dreadful opposition between man and God.

There is an interesting point to be observed here before we pass on. The Holy Ghost has recorded an incident, in which the momentary but guilty unbelief of Thomas was covered by the Lord's grace. It was needful to relate it; but the Holy Ghost has taken care to show us, that Thomas loved the Lord, and was ready, at heart, to die with Him. We have other instances of the same kind. Paul says, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry." Poor Mark! this was necessary on account of what took place at Perga. Barnabas also has the same place in the apostle's affection and remembrance. We are weak: God does not hide it from us; but He throws the testimony of His grace over the feeblest of His servants.

But to continue. Caiaphas, the chief of the Jews, as high priest, proposes the death of Jesus, because He had restored Lazarus to life. And from that day they conspire against Him. Jesus yields to it. He came to give His life a ransom for many. He goes on to fulfill the work His love had undertaken, in accordance with His Father's will, whatever might be the devices and the malice of men. The work of life and Or death, of Satan and of God, were face to face. But the counsels of God were being accomplished in grace, whatever the means might be. Jesus devotes Himself to the work by

which they were to be fulfilled. Having shown the power of resurrection and of life in Himself, He is again, when the time comes, quietly in the place to which His service led Him; but He no longer goes in the same manner as before into the temple. He goes thither indeed; but the question between God and man was morally settled already.

His place (chap. 12) now is with the remnant, where His heart found rest — the house of Bethany. We have, in this family, a sample of the true remnant of Israel, three different cases with regard to their position before God. Martha had faith which, no doubt, attached her to Christ, but which did not go beyond that which was needed for the kingdom. Those who will be spared for the earth in the last days will have the same. Their faith will at length acknowledge Christ the Son of God. Lazarus was there, living by that power which could have also raised up all the dead saints in the same way,\* which, by grace, at the last day, will call up Israel, morally, from their state of death. In a word, we find the remnant, who will not die, spared through true faith (but faith in a living Savior, who should deliver Israel), and those who shall be brought back as from the dead, to enjoy the kingdom. Martha served; Jesus is in company with them; Lazarus sits at the table with Him.

[\* I speak only of the power needed to produce this effect; for in truth, the sinful condition of man, whether Jew or Gentile, required expiation; and there would have been no saints to call out from among the dead, if the grace of God had not acted by virtue, and in view, of that expiation. I speak merely of the power that dwelt in the Person of Christ, that overcame all the power of death, which could do nothing against the Son of God. But man's condition, which made the death of Christ necessary, was only demonstrated by His rejection, which proved that all means were unavailing to bring back man, as he was, to God.]

But there was also the representative of another class. Mary, who had drunk at the fountain of truth, and had received that living water into her heart, had understood that there was something more than the hope and the blessing of Israel — namely, Jesus Himself. She does that which is suitable to Jesus in His rejection — to Him who is the resurrection before He is our life. Her heart associates her with that act of His, and she anoints Him for His burial. To her it is Jesus Himself who is in question — and Jesus rejected; and faith takes its place in that which was the seed of the assembly, still hidden in the soil of Israel and of this world, but which, in the resurrection, would come forth in all the beauty of the life of God — of



eternal life. It is a faith that expends itself on Him, on His body, in which He was about to undergo the penalty of sin for our salvation. The selfishness of unbelief, betraying its sin in its contempt of Christ, and in its indifference, gives the Lord occasion to attach its true value to this action of His beloved disciple. Her anointing His feet is pointed out here, as showing that all that was of Christ, that which was Christ, had to her a value which prevented her regarding anything else. This is a we appreciation of Christ. The faith that knows His love which passes knowledge — this kind of faith is a sweet odour in the whole house. And God remembers it according to His grace. Jesus understood her: that was all she wanted. He justifies her: who should rise up against her? This scene is over, and the course of events is resumed.

The enmity of the Jews (alas! that of man's heart, thus given up to itself, and consequently to the enemy who is a murderer by nature and the enemy of God — an enemy that nothing merely human can subdue) would fain kill Lazarus also. Man is indeed capable of this: but capable of what? Everything yields to hatred — to this kind of hatred of God who manifests Himself. But for this it would in fact be inconceivable. They must now either believe in Jesus or reject Him: for His power was so evident that they must do the one or the other — a man publicly raised from the dead after four days, and alive among the people, left no longer any possibility of indecision. Jesus knew it divinely. He presents Himself as Ring of Israel to assert His rights, and to offer salvation and the promised glory to the people and to Jerusalem.\* The people understand this. It must be a deliberate rejection, as the Pharisees are well aware. But the hour was come: and although they could do nothing, for the world went after Him, Jesus is put to death, for "he gave himself."

[\* In this Gospel the occasion of the assembling of the crowd to meet and to accompany Jesus, was the raising of Lazarus — the testimony to His being Son of God.]

The second testimony of God to Christ has now been born to Him, as the true Son of David. He has been witnessed to as the Son of God in raising Lazarus (chap. 11:4), and Son of David in riding into Jerusalem on the ass's colt. There was yet another title to be acknowledged. As Son of man He is to possess all the kingdoms of the earth. The Greeks\* come (for His fame had gone abroad), and desire to see Him. Jesus says, "The hour is

come for the Son of man to be glorified.” But now He returns to the thoughts of which Mary’s ointment was the expression to His heart. He should have been received as the Son of David; but, in taking His place as the Son of man, a very different thing necessarily opens before Him. How could He be seen as Son of man, coming in the clouds of heaven to take possession of all things according to the counsels of God, without dying? If His human service on earth was finished, and He had gone out free, calling, if need were, for twelve legions of angels, no one could have had any part with Him: He would have remained alone. “Except the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” If Christ takes His heavenly glory, and is not alone in it, He dies to attain it, and to bring with Him the souls whom God has given Him. In fact the hour was come: it could no longer tarry. Everything was now ready for the end of the trial of this world, of man, of Israel; and, above all, the counsels of God were being fulfilled.

[\* Greeks properly speaking: not Hellenists, that is, Jews who spoke the Greek language, and belonged to foreign countries, being of the dispersion.]

Outwardly all was testimony to His glory. He enters Jerusalem in triumph — the multitude proclaiming Him King. What were the Romans about? They were silent before God. The Greeks came to seek Him. All is ready for the glory of the Son of man. But the heart of Jesus well knew that for this glory — for the accomplishment of the work of God, for His having one human being with Him in the glory, for the granary of God to be filled according to the counsels of grace — He must die. No other way for guilty souls to come to God. That which Mary’s affection foresaw, Jesus knows according to the truth; and according to the mind of God He feels it, and submits to it. And the Father responds at this solemn moment, by bearing testimony to the glorious effect of that which His sovereign majesty at the same time required — majesty which Jesus fully glorified by His obedience: and who could do this, excepting Him who, by that obedience, brought in the love and the power of God which accomplished it?

In that which follows, the Lord introduces a great principle connected with the truth contained in His sacrifice. There was no link between the natural life of man and God. If in the man Christ Jesus there was a life in entire harmony with God, He must needs lay it down on account of this condition of man. Being of God, He could not remain in connection with

man. Man would not have it. Jesus would rather die than not fulfill His service by glorifying God — than not be obedient unto the end. But if any one loved his life of this world, he lost it; for it was not in connection with God. If any one by grace hated it — separated himself in heart from this principle of alienation from God, and devoted his life to Him, he would have it in the new and eternal state. To serve Jesus therefore was to follow Him; and where He was going, there should His servant be. The result of association of heart with Jesus here, shown in following Him, passes out of this world, as He was indeed doing, and Messiah blessings, into the heavenly and eternal glory of Christ. If any one served Him, the Father would remember it, and would honor him. All this is said in view of His death, the thought of which comes over His mind; and His soul is troubled. And in the just dread of that hour which, in itself, is the judgment of God, and the end of man as God created him here on earth, He asks God to deliver Him from that hour. And, in truth, He had come — not then to be (although He was) the Messiah, not then (although it was His right) to take the kingdom; but He had come for this very hour — by dying to glorify His Father. This He desires, involve what it may. “Father, glorify thy name,” is His only prayer. This is perfectness — He feels what death is: there would have been no sacrifice if He had not felt it. But while feeling it, His only desire was to glorify His Father. If that cost Him everything, the work was perfect in proportion.

Perfect in this desire, and that unto death, the Father could not but answer Him. In His answer, as it appears to me, the Father announces the resurrection. But what grace, what marvel, to be admitted into such communications! The heart is astounded, while filled with worship and with grace, in beholding the perfection of Jesus, the Son of God, unto death; that is to say, absolute; and in seeing Him, with the full sense of what death was, seeking the sole glory of the Father; and the Father answering — an answer morally needful to this sacrifice of the Son, and to His own glory. Thus He said, “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” I believe that He had glorified it in the resurrection of Lazarus;\* He would do so again in the resurrection of Christ — a glorious resurrection which, in itself, implied ours; even as the Lord had said, without naming His own.

[\* Resurrection follows the condition of Christ. Lazarus was raised while Christ was living here in the flesh, and Lazarus is raised to life in the flesh. When Christ in glory raises us, He will raise us in glory. And even now that Christ is hid in God, our life is hid with Him there.]

Let us now observe the connection of the truths spoken of in this remarkable passage. The hour was come for the glory of the Son of man. But, in order to this, it needed that the precious corn of wheat should fall into the ground and die; else it would remain alone. This was the universal principle. The natural life of this world in us had no part with God. Jesus must be followed. We should thus be with Him: this was serving Him. Thus also we should be honored by the Father. Christ, for Himself, looks death in the face, and feels all its import. Nevertheless He gives Himself to one only thing — the glory of His Father. The Father answers Him in this. His desire should be fulfilled. He should not be without an answer to His perfection. The people hear it as the voice of the Lord God, as described in the Psalms. Christ (who, in all this, had put Himself entirely aside, had spoken only of the glory of His followers and of His Father) declares that this voice came for the people's sake, in order that they might understand what He was for their salvation. Then there opens before Him, who had thus put Himself aside and submitted to everything for His Father's sake, not the future glory, but the value, the import, the glory, of the work He was about to do. The principles of which we have spoken are here brought to the central point of their development. In His death the world was judged: Satan was its prince, and he is cast out: in appearance it is Christ who was so. By death He morally and judicially destroyed him who had the power of death. It was the total and entire annihilation of all the rights of the enemy, over whomsoever and whatsoever it might be, when the Son of God and Son of man bore the judgment of God as man in obedience unto death. All the rights that Satan possessed through man's disobedience and the judgment of God upon it, were only rights in virtue of the claims of God upon man, and come back to Christ alone. And being lifted up between God and the world, in obedience, on the cross, bearing that which was due to sin, Christ became the point of attraction for all men living, that through Him they might draw nigh to God. While living, Jesus ought to have been owned as the Messiah of promise; lifted up from the earth as a victim before God, being no longer of the earth as living upon it, He was the point of attraction towards God for all those who, living on earth, were

alienated from God, as we have seen, that they might come to Him there (by grace), and have life through the Savior's death. Jesus warns the people that it was only for a little time that He, the light of the world, would remain with them. They should believe while it was yet time. Soon would the darkness come, and they would not know whither they went. We see that, whatever might be the thoughts that occupy His heart, the love of Jesus never grows cold. He thinks of those around Him — of men according to their need.

Nevertheless they did not believe according to the testimony of the prophet, given in view of His humiliation unto death, given in sight of the vision of His divine glory, which could but bring judgment on a rebellious people (Isaiah 53 and 6).

Nevertheless, such is grace, His humiliation should be their salvation; and, in the glory that judged them, God would remember the counsels of His grace, as sure a fruit of that glory as was the judgment which the Holy, Holy, Holy, Jehovah of Hosts must pronounce against evil — a judgment suspended, by His long — suffering, during centuries, but now fulfilled when these last efforts of His mercy were despised and rejected. They preferred the praise of men.

At last Jesus declares that which His coming really was — that in fact, they who believed in Him, in the Jesus whom they saw on the earth, believed in His Father, and saw His Father. He was come as the light, and they who believed should not walk in darkness. He did not judge; He was come to save; but the word which He had spoken should judge those who heard, for it was the Father's word, and it was life everlasting.

**CHAPTER 13.** Now, then, the Lord has taken His place as going to the Father. The time was come for it. He takes His place above, according to the counsels of God, and is no longer in connection with a world that had already rejected Him; but He loves His own unto the end. Two things are present to Him: on the one hand, sin taking the form most painful to His heart; and on the other, the sense of all glory being given to Him as man, and of whence He came and whither He was going: that is, His personal and heavenly character in relationship with God, and the glory that was given Him. He came from God and went to God; and the Father had put all things into His hands.

But neither His entrance into glory, nor the heartlessness of man's sin, takes His heart away from His disciples or even from their wants. Only He exercises His love, to put them in connection with Himself in the new position He was creating for them by entering thus into it. He could no longer remain with them on earth; and if He left them, and must leave them, He would not give them up, but fit them for being where He was. He loved them with a love that nothing stopped. It went on to perfect its results; and He must fit them to be with Him. Blessed change that love accomplished even from His being with them here below! They were to have a part with Him who came from God and went to God, and into whose hands the Father had put all things; but then they must be fit to be with Him there. To this end He is still their servant in love, and even more so than ever. No doubt He had been so in His perfect grace, but it was while among them. They were thus in a certain sense companions. They were all supping together here at the same table. But He quits this position, as He did His personal association with His disciples by ascending to heaven, by going to God. But, if He does, He still girds Himself for their service, and takes water\* to wash their feet. Although in heaven, He is still serving us.\*\* The effect of this service is, that the Holy Ghost takes away practically by the word all the defilement that we gather in walking through this world of sin. On our way we come in contact with this world that rejected Christ. Our Advocate on high (compare 1 John 2), He cleanses us from its defilement by the Holy Ghost and the word; He cleanses us in view of the relationships with God His Father, unto which He has brought us by entering into them Himself as man on high.

[\* It is not blood here. That assuredly there must be. He came not by water only, but by water and blood; but here the washing is in every respect that of water. The washing from sins in His own blood is never repeated at all in any way. Christ must have suffered often in that case. See Hebrews 9 and 10. In respect of imputation, there is no more conscience of sins.]

[\* The Lord in becoming a man took on Him the form of a servant (Philippians 2). This He never gives up. It might have been thought so when He went into glory, but He is showing here that it is not so. He is now as in Exodus 21 saying, I love my master, I love my wife, I love my children; I will not go out free; and becoming a servant for ever, even if He could have had twelve legions of angels. Here He is a servant to wash their feet, defiled in passing through this world. In Luke 12 we see that He keeps the place of service in glory. It is a sweet thought that even there He ministers heaven's best blessedness to our happiness.]

A purity was needed that should befit the presence of God, for He was going there. However it is only the feet that are in question. The priests that served God in the tabernacle were washed at their consecration. That washing was not repeated. So, when once spiritually renewed by the word, this is not repeated for us. In “he that is washed” it is a different word from “save to wash his feet.” The first is bathing the whole body; the latter washing hands or feet. We need the latter continually, but are not, once born of water by the word, washed over again, any more than the priests’ first consecration was repeated. The priests washed their hands and their feet every time they engaged in service — that they drew near to God. Our Jesus restores communion and power to serve God, when we have lost it. He does it, and with a view to communion and service; for before God we are entirely clean personally. The service was the service of Christ — of His love. He wiped their feet with the towel wherewith He was girded (a circumstance expressive of service). The means of purification was water — the word, applied by the Holy Ghost. Peter shrinks from the idea of Christ thus humbling Himself. but we must submit to this thought, that our sin is such that nothing less than the humiliation of Christ can in any sense cleanse us from it. Nothing else will make us really know the perfect and dazzling purity of God, or the love and devotedness of Jesus: and in the realisation of these consists the having a heart sanctified for the presence of God. Peter, then, would have the Lord to wash also his hands and his head. But this is already accomplished. If we are His we are born again and cleansed by the word which He has already applied to our souls; only we defile our feet in walking. It is after the pattern of this service of Christ in grace that we are to act with regard to our brethren.

Judas was not clean; he had not been born again, was not clean through the word Jesus had spoken. Nevertheless, being sent of the Lord, they who had received him had received Christ. And this is true also of those whom He sends by His Spirit. This thought brings the treachery of Judas before the Lord’s mind; His soul is troubled at the thought, and He unburdens His heart by declaring it to His disciples. What His heart is occupied with here is, not His knowledge of the individual, but of the fact that one of them should do it, one of those who had been His companions.

Therefore it was, because of His saying this, that the disciples looked upon one another. Now there was one near Him, the disciple whom Jesus loved; for we have, in all this part of the Gospel of John, the testimony of grace that answers to the diverse forms of malice and wickedness in man. This love of Jesus had formed the heart of John — had given him confidingness and constancy of affection; and consequently, without any other motive than this, he was near enough to Jesus to receive communications from Him. It was not in order to receive them that he placed himself close to Jesus: he was there because he loved the Lord, whose own love had thus attached him to Himself; but, being there, he was able to receive them. It is thus that we may still learn of Him.

Peter loved Him: but there was too much of Peter, not for service, if God called him to it — and He did in grace, when He had thoroughly broken him down, and made him know himself — but for intimacy. Who, among the twelve, bore testimony like Peter, in whom God was mighty towards the circumcision? But we do not find in his epistles that which is found in John's.\* Moreover each one has his place, given in the sovereignty of God. Peter loved Christ; and we see that, linked also with John by this common affection, they are constantly together; as also at the end of this Gospel he is anxious to know the fate of John. He uses John, therefore, to ask the Lord, which it was among them that should betray Him, as He had said. Let us remember that being near Jesus for His own sake is the way of having His mind when anxious thoughts arise. Jesus points out Judas by the sop, which would have checked any other, but which to him was only the seal of his ruin. It is indeed thus in degree with every favor of God that falls upon a heart that rejects it. After the sop Satan enters into Judas. Wicked already through covetousness, and yielding habitually to ordinary temptations; although he was with Jesus, hardening his heart against the effect of that grace which was ever before his eyes and at his side, and which, in a certain way, was exercised towards him, he had yielded to the suggestion of the enemy, and made himself the tool of the high priests to betray the Lord. He knew what they desired, and goes and offers himself. And when, by his long familiarity with the grace and presence of Jesus while addicting himself to sin, that grace and the thought of the Person of Christ had entirely lost their influence, he was in a state to feel nothing at betraying Him. The knowledge he had of the Lord's power, helped him to



give himself up to evil, and strengthened the temptation of Satan; for evidently he made sure that Jesus would always succeed in delivering Himself from His enemies, and, as far as power was concerned, Judas was right in thinking that the Lord could have done so. But what knew he of the thoughts of God? All was darkness, morally, in his soul.

[\* On the other hand, Peter died for the Lord. John was left to care for the assembly: it does not appear that he became a martyr.]

And now, after this last testimony, which was both a token of grace and a witness to the true state of his heart that was insensible to it (as expressed in the Psalm here fulfilled), Satan enters into him, takes possession of him so as to harden him against all that might have made him feel, even as a man, the horrid nature of what he was doing, and thus enfeeble him in accomplishing the evil; so that neither his conscience nor his heart should be awakened in committing it. Dreadful condition! Satan possesses him, until forced to leave him to the judgment from which he cannot shelter him, and which will be his own at the time appointed of God — judgment that manifests itself to the conscience of Judas when the evil was done, when too late (and the sense of which is shown by a despair that his link with Satan did but augment) but which is forced to bear testimony to Jesus before those who had profited by his sin and who mocked at his distress. For despair speaks the truth; the veil is torn away; there is no longer self-deception; the conscience is laid bare before God, but it is before His judgment. Satan does not deceive there; and not the grace, but the perfection of Christ is known. Judas bore witness to the innocence of Jesus, as did the thief on the cross. It is thus that death and destruction heard the fame of His wisdom: only God knows it (Job 28:22, 23).

Jesus knew his condition. It was but the accomplishing that which He was going to do, by means of one for whom there was no longer any hope. “That thou doest,” said Jesus, “do quickly.” But what words, when we hear them from the lips of Him who was love itself! Nevertheless, the eyes of Jesus were not fixed upon His own death. He is alone. No one, not even His disciples, had any part with Him. These could no more follow Him whether He was now going, than the Jews themselves. Solemn but glorious hour! A man, He was going to meet God in that which separated man from God — to meet Him in judgment. This, in fact, is what He says, as soon as

Judas is gone out. The door which closed on Judas separated Christ from this world.

“Now,” He says, “is the Son of man glorified.” He had said this when the Greeks arrived; but then it was the glory to come — His glory as the head of all men, and, in fact, of all things. But this could not yet be; and He said, “Father, glorify thy name.” Jesus must die. It was that which glorified the name of God in a world where sin was. It was the glory of the Son of man to accomplish it there, where all the power of the enemy, the effect of sin, and the judgment of God upon sin, were displayed; where the question was morally settled; where Satan (in his power over sinful man — man under sin, and that fully developed in open enmity against God), and God met, not as in the case of Job, as an instrument in God’s hand for discipline, but for justice — that which God was against sin, but that in which, through Christ’s giving Himself, all His attributes should be in exercise, and be glorified, and by which, in fact, through that which took place, all the perfections of God have been glorified, being manifested through Jesus, or by means of that which Jesus did and suffered.

These perfections had been directly unfolded in Him, as far as grace went; but now that the opportunity of the exercise of all of them was afforded, by His taking a place which put Him to the proof according to the attributes of God, their divine perfection could be displayed through man in Jesus there where He stood in the place of man; and (made sin, and, thank God, for the sinner) God was glorified in Him. For see what in fact met in the cross: Satan’s complete power over men, Jesus alone excepted; man in open perfect enmity against God in the rejection of His Son; God manifest in grace: then in Christ, as man, perfect love to His Father, and perfect obedience, and that in the place of sin, that is, as made it (for the perfection of love to His Father and obedience were when He was as sin before God on the cross); then God’s majesty made good, glorified (Hebrews 2:10); His perfect, righteous, judgment against sin as the Holy One; but therein His perfect love to sinners in giving His only-begotten Son. For hereby know we love. To sum it up: at the cross we find, man in absolute evil — the hatred of what was good; Satan’s full power over the world — the prince of this world; man in perfect goodness, obedience, and love to the Father at all cost to Himself; God in absolute, infinite, righteousness against sin, and infinite divine love to the sinner. Good and

evil were fully settled for ever, and salvation wrought, the foundation of the new heavens and the new earth laid. Well may we say, “Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him.” Utterly dishonored in the first, He is infinitely more glorified in the Second, and therefore puts man (Christ) in glory, and straightway, not waiting for the kingdom. But this requires some less abstract words; for the cross is the center of the universe, according to God, the basis of our salvation and our glory, and the brightest manifestation of God’s own glory, the center of the history of eternity.

The Lord had said, when the Greeks desired to see Him, that the hour was come for the Son of man to be glorified. He spoke then of His glory as Son of man, the glory which He should take under that title. He felt indeed that in order to bring men into that glory, He must needs pass through death Himself. But He was engrossed by one thing which detached His thoughts from the glory and from the suffering — the desire which possessed His heart that His Father should be glorified. All was now come to the point at which this was to be accomplished; and the moment had arrived when Judas (overstepping the limits of God’s just and perfect patience) was gone out, giving the reins to his iniquity, to consummate the crime which would lead to the wonderful fulfillment of the counsels of God.

Now, in Jesus on the cross, the Son of man has been glorified in a much more admirable way than He will be even by the positive glory that belongs to Him under that title. He will, we know, be clothed with that glory; but, on the cross, the Son of man bore all that was necessary for the perfect display of all the glory of God. The whole weight of that glory was brought to bear upon Him, to put Him to the proof, that it might be seen whether He could sustain it, verify, and exalt it; and that by setting it forth in the place where, but for this, sin concealed that glory, and, so to speak, gave it impiously the lie. Was the Son of man able to enter into such a place, to undertake such a task, and to accomplish the task, and maintain His place without failure to the end? This Jesus did. The majesty of God was to be vindicated against the insolent rebellion of His creature; His truth, which had threatened Him with death, maintained; His justice established against sin (who could withstand it?); and, at the same time, His love fully demonstrated. Satan having here all the sorrowful rights that he had acquired through our sin, Christ — perfect as a man, alone, apart

from all men, in obedience, and having as man but one object, that is, the glory of God, thus divinely perfect, sacrificing Himself for this purposefully glorified God. God was glorified in Him. His justice, His majesty, His truth, His love — all was verified on the cross as they are in Himself, and revealed only there; and that with regard to sin.

And God can now act freely, according to that which He is consciously to Himself, without any one attribute hiding, or obscuring, or contradicting another. Truth condemned man to death, justice for ever condemned the sinner, majesty demanded the execution of the sentence. Where, then, was love? If love, as man would conceive it, were to pass over all, where would be His majesty and His justice? Moreover, that could not be; nor would it really then be love, but indifference to evil. By means of the cross, He is just, and He justifies in grace; He is love, and in that love He bestows His righteousness on man. The righteousness of God takes the place of man's sin to the believer. The righteousness, as well as the sin, of man vanishes before the bright light of grace, and does not becloud the sovereign glory of a grace like this towards man, who was really alienated from God.

And who had accomplished this? Who had thus established (as to its manifestation, and the making it good where it had been, as to the state of things, compromised by sin), the whole glory of God? It was the Son of man. Therefore God glorifies Him with His own glory; for it was indeed that glory which He had established and made honorable, when before His creatures it was effaced by sin — it cannot be so in itself. And not only was it established, but it was thus realised as it could have been by no other means. Never was love like the gift of the Son of God for sinners; never justice (to which sin is insupportable) like that which did not spare even the Son Himself when He bore sin upon Him; never majesty like that which held the Son of God Himself responsible for the full extent of its exigencies (compare Hebrews 2); never truth like that which did not yield before the necessity of the death of Jesus. We now know God. God, being glorified in the Son of man, glorifies Him in Himself. But, consequently, He does not wait for the day of His glory with man, according to the thought of chapter 12. God calls Him to His own right hand, and sets Him there at once and alone. Who could be there (save in spirit) excepting He? Here His glory is connected with that which He alone could do — with

that which He must have done alone; and of which He must have the fruit alone with God, for He was God.

Other glories shall come in their time. He will share them with us, although in all things He has the pre-eminence. Here He is, and must ever be, alone (that is, in that which is personal to Himself). Who shared the cross with Him, as suffering for sin, and fulfilling righteousness? We, indeed, share it with Him so far as suffering for righteousness' sake, and for the love of Him and His people, even unto death: and thus we shall share His glory also. But it is evident that we could not glorify God for sin. He who knew no sin could alone be made sin. The Son of God alone could bear this burden.

In this sense the Lord — when His heart found relief in pouring out these glorious thoughts, these marvelous counsels — addressed His disciples with affection, telling them that their connection with Him here below would soon be ended, that He was going where they could not follow Him, any more than could the unbelieving Jews. Brotherly love was, in a certain sense, to take His place. They were to love one another as He had loved them, with a love superior to the faults of the flesh in their brethren — brotherly love gracious in these respects. If the main pillar were taken away against which many around it were leaning, they would support each other, although not by their strength. And thus should the disciples of Christ be known.

Now Simon Peter desires to penetrate into that which no man, save Jesus, could enter — God's presence by the path of death. This is fleshly confidence. The Lord tells him, in grace, that it could not be so now. He must dry up that sea fathomless to man — death — that overflowing Jordan; and then, when it was no longer the judgment of God, nor wielded by the power of Satan (for in both these characters Christ has entirely destroyed its power for the believer), then His poor disciple might pass through it for the sake of righteousness and of Christ. But Peter would follow Him in his own strength, declaring himself able to do exactly that which Jesus was going to do for him. Yet, in fact, terrified at the first movement of the enemy, he draws back before the voice of a girl, and denies the Master whom he loved. In the things of God, fleshly confidence

does but lead us into a position in which it cannot stand. Sincerity alone can do nothing against the enemy. We must have the strength of God.

The Lord now (chap. 14) begins to discourse with them in view of His departure. He was going where they could not come. To human sight they would be left alone upon the earth. It is to the sense of this apparently desolate condition that the Lord addresses Himself, showing them that He was an object for faith, even as God was. In doing this, He opens to them the whole truth with respect to their condition. His work is not the subject treated of, but their position by virtue of that work. His Person should have been for them the key to that position, and would be so now: the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, who should come, would be the power by which they should enjoy it, and indeed more yet.

To Peter's question, "Whither goest thou?" the Lord replies. Only when the desire of the flesh seeks to enter into the path on which Jesus was then entering, the Lord could but say that the strength of the flesh was unavailing there; for, in fact, he proposed to follow Christ in death. Poor Peter!

But when the Lord has written the sentence of death upon the flesh for us, by revealing its impotency, He can then (chap. 14) reveal that which is beyond it for faith; and that which belongs to us through His death throws its light back, and teaches who He was, even when on earth, and always, before the world was. He did but return to the place from which He came. But He begins with His disciples where they were, and meets the need of their hearts by explaining to them in what manner — better, in a certain sense, than by following Him here below — they should be with Him when absent where He would be. They did not see God corporeally present with them: to enjoy His presence they believed in Him; It was to be the same thing with regard to Jesus. They were to believe in Him. He did not forsake them in going away, as though there were only room for Himself in His Father's house. (He alludes to the temple as a figure.) There was room for them all. The going thither, observe, was still His thought — He is not here as the Messiah. We see Him in the relationships in which He stood according to the eternal truths of God. He had always His departure in view: had there been no room for them, He would have told them so. Their place was with Him. But He was going to prepare a place

for them. Without presenting redemption there, and presenting Himself as the new man according to the power of that redemption, there was no place prepared in heaven. He enters it in the power of that life which should bring them in also. But they should not go alone to rejoin Him, nor would He rejoin them down here. Heaven, not earth, was in question. Nor would He simply send others for them; but as those He dearly valued, He would come for them Himself, and receive them unto Himself, that where He was, there should they be also. He would come from the Father's throne: there, of course, they cannot sit; but He will receive them there, where He shall be in glory before the Father. They should be with Him — a far more excellent position than His remaining with them here below, even as Messiah in glory on the earth.

Now, also, having said where He was going, that is, to His Father (and speaking according to the effect of His death for them), He tells them that they knew whither He was going, and the way. For He was going to the Father, and they had seen the Father in seeing Him; and thus, having seen the Father in Him, they knew the way; for in coming to Him, they came to the Father, who was in Him as He was in the Father. He was, then, Himself the way. Therefore He reproaches Philip with not having known Him. He had been long with them, as the revelation in His own Person of the Father; and they ought to have known Him, and to have seen that He was in the Father, and the Father in Him, and thus have known where He was going, for it was to the Father. He had declared the name of the Father; and if they were unable to see the Father in Him, or to be convinced of it by His words, they ought to have known it by His works; for the Father who dwelt in Him — He it was who did the works. This depended on His own Person, being still in the world; but a striking proof was connected with His departure. After He was gone, they would do even greater works than He did, because they should act in connection with His greater nearness to the Father. This was requisite to His glory. It was even unlimited. He placed them in immediate connection with the Father by the power of His work and of His name; and whatsoever they should ask the Father in His name, Christ Himself would do it for them. Their request should be heard and granted by the Father — shewing what nearness He had acquired for them; and He (Christ) would do all they should ask. For the power of the Son was not, and could not be, wanting to the Father's

will: there was no limit to His power. 366 But this led to another subject. If they loved Him, it was to be shown, not in regrets, but in keeping His commandments. They were to walk in obedience. This characterises discipleship up to the present time. Love desires to be with Him, but shows itself by obeying His commands; for Christ also has a right to command. On the other hand He would seek their good on high, and another blessing should be granted them; namely, the Holy Ghost Himself, who should never leave them, as Christ was about to do. The world could not receive Him. Christ, the Son, had been shown to the eyes of the world, and ought to have been received by it. The Holy Ghost would act, being invisible; for by the rejection of Christ, it was all over with the world in its natural and creature relationships with God. But the Holy Ghost should be known by the disciples; for He should not only remain with them, as Christ could not, but be in them, not with them as He was. The Holy Ghost would not be seen then or known by the world.

Until now, in His discourse, He had led His disciples to follow Him (in spirit) on high, through the knowledge which acquaintance with His Person (in which the Father was revealed) gave them of whither He was going, and of the way. He was Himself the way, as we have seen. He was the truth itself, in the revelation (and the perfect revelation) of God and of the soul's relationship to Him; and, indeed, of the real condition and character of all things, by bringing out the perfect light of God in His own Person who revealed Him. He was the life, in which God and the truth could thus be known. Men came by Him; they found the Father revealed in Him; and they possessed in Him that which enabled them to enjoy, and in the reception of which they came in fact to, the Father.

But, now, it is not what is objective which He presents; not the Father in Him (which they ought to have known) and He in the Father, when here below. He does not, therefore, raise their thoughts to the Father through Himself and in Himself, and He in the Father in heaven. He sets before them that which should be given them down here — the stream of blessing that should flow for them in this world, by virtue of that which Jesus was, and was for them, in heaven. The Holy Ghost once introduced as sent, the Lord says, "I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you." His presence, in spirit, here below, is the consolation of His people. They should see Him; and this is much more true than seeing Him with the eyes



of flesh. Yes, more true; it is knowing Him in a much more real way, even though by grace they had believed in Him as the Christ, the Son of God. And, moreover, this spiritual sight of Christ by the heart, through the presence of the Holy Ghost, is connected with life. "Because I live, ye shall live also." We see Him, because we have life, and this life is in Him, and He in this life. "This life is in the Son." It is as sure as His duration. It is derived from Him. Because He lives, we shall live. Our life is, in everything, the manifestation of Himself who is our life. Even as the apostle expresses it, "That the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal bodies." Alas! the flesh resists; but this is our life in Christ.

But this is not all. The Holy Ghost dwelling in us, we know that we are in Christ.\* "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." It is not "the Father in me which, however, was always true], and I in him" — words, the first of which, here omitted, expressed the reality of His manifestation of the Father here on earth. The Lord only expresses that which belongs to His being really and divinely one with the Father — "I am in my Father." It is this last part of the truth (implied, doubtless, in the other when rightly understood) of which the Lord here speaks. It could not really be so; but men might imagine such a thing as a manifestation of God in a man, without this man being really such — so truly God, that is to say, in Himself — that it must also be said, He is in the Father. People dream of such things; they speak of the manifestation of God in flesh. We speak of God manifest in the flesh. But here all ambiguity is obviated — He was in the Father, and it is this part of the truth which is repeated here; adding to it, in virtue of the presence of the Holy Ghost, that while the disciples should indeed fully know the divine Person of Jesus, they should moreover know that they were themselves in Him. He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit. Jesus did not say that they ought to have known this while He was with them on earth. They ought to have known that the Father was in Him and He in the Father. But in that He was alone. The disciples, however, having received the Holy Ghost, should know their own being in Him — a union of which the Holy Ghost is the strength and the bond. The life of Christ flows from Him in us. He is in the Father, we in Him, and He also in us, according to the power of the presence of the Holy Ghost.

[\* Note, this is individual, not the union of the members of the body with Christ; nor is union indeed an exact term for it. We are in Him. This is more than union, but not the same thing. It is nature and life, and position in it, our place in that nature and life. When He was on earth, and they had not the Holy Ghost, they should have known that He was in the Father and the Father in Him. When He was in heaven, and they had the Holy Ghost, they would know they were in Him and He in them.]

This is the subject of the common faith, true of all. But there is continual guardianship and government, and Jesus manifests Himself to us in connection with, and in a manner dependent on, our walk. He who is mindful of the Lord's will possesses it, and observes it. A good child not only obeys when he knows his father's will, but he acquires the knowledge of that will by giving heed to it. This is the spirit of obedience in love. If we act thus with regard to Jesus, the Father, who takes account of all that relates to His Son, will love us. Jesus will also love us, and will manifest Himself to us. Judas (not Iscariot) did not understand this, because he saw no farther than a bodily manifestation of Christ, such as the world also could perceive. Jesus therefore adds, that the truly obedient disciples (and here He speaks more spiritually and generally of His word, not merely of His commandments) should be loved of the Father, and that the Father and Himself would come and make their abode with him. So that, if there be obedience, while waiting for the time when we shall go and dwell with Jesus in the Father's presence, He and the Father dwell in us. The Father and the Son manifest themselves in us, in whom the Holy Ghost is dwelling, even as the Father and the Holy Ghost were present, when the Son was here below — doubtless in another way, for He was the Son, and we only live by Him — the Holy Ghost only dwelling in us. But with respect to those glorious Persons they are not disunited. The Father did the works in Christ, and Jesus cast out devils by the Holy Ghost; nevertheless, the Son wrought. If the Holy Ghost is in us, the Father and the Son come and make their abode in us. Only it will be observed here that there is government. We are, according to the new life, sanctified unto obedience. It is not here a question of the love of God in sovereign grace to a sinner, but of the Father's dealings with His children. Therefore it is in the path of obedience that the manifestations of the Father's love and the love of Christ are found. We love, but do not caress, our naughty children. If we grieve the Spirit, He will not be in us the power of the manifestation to our souls of the Father and the Son in communion, but will rather act on

our consciences in conviction, though giving the sense of grace. God may restore us by His love, and by testifying when we have wandered; but communion is in obedience. Finally, Jesus was to be obeyed; but it was the Father's word to Jesus, observe, as He was here below. His words were the words of the Father.

The Holy Ghost bears testimony to that which Christ was, as well as to His glory. It is the manifestation of the perfect life of man, of God in man, of the Father in the Son — the manifestation of the Father by the Son who is in the bosom of the Father. Such were the words of the Son here below; and when we speak of His commandments, it is not only the manifestation of His glory by the Holy Ghost, when He is on high, and its results; but His commandments when He spoke here below, and spoke the words of God; for He had not the Holy Ghost by measure, so that His words would have been mingled, and partly imperfect, or at least not divine. He was truly man, and ever man; but it was God manifest in the flesh. The old commandment from the beginning is new, inasmuch as this same life, which expressed itself in His commandments, now moves in and animates us — true in Him and in us (compare 1 John 2). The commandments are those of the man Christ, yet they are the commandments of God and the words of the Father, according to the life that has been manifested in this world in the Person of Christ. They express in Him, and form and direct in us, that eternal life which was with the Father, and which has been manifested to us in man — in Him whom the apostles could see, hear, and touch; and which life we possess in Him. Nevertheless the Holy Ghost has been given us to lead us into all truth, according to this same chapter of John's Epistle "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things."

To direct life is different from knowing all things. The two are connected, because, in walking according to that life, we do not grieve the Holy Spirit, and we are in the light. To direct life, where it exists, is not the same thing as to give a law imposed on man in the flesh (righteously, no doubt), promising him life if he keep these commandments. This is the difference between the commandments of Christ and the law: not as to authority — divine authority is always the same in itself — but that the law offers life, and is addressed to man responsible in flesh, offering him life as the result; while the commandments of Christ express and direct the life of one who

lives through the Spirit, in connection with his being in Christ, and Christ in him. The Holy Ghost (who, besides this, teaches all things) brought to remembrance the commandments of Christ — all things that He had said to them. It is the same thing in detail, by His grace, with Christians individually now.

Finally, the Lord, in the midst of this world, left peace to His disciples, giving them His own peace. It is when going away, and in the full revelation of God, that He could say this to them; so that He possessed it in spite of the world. He had gone through death and the drinking of the cup, put away sin for them, destroyed the power of the enemy in death, made propitiation by fully glorifying God. Peace was made, and made for them before God, and all that they were brought into — the light as He was, so that this peace was perfect in the light; and it was perfect in the world, because it brought them so into connection with God that the world could not even touch or reach their source of joy. Moreover Jesus had so accomplished this for them, and He bestowed it on them in such a way, that He gave them the peace which He Himself had with the Father, and in which, consequently, He walked in this world. The world gives a part of its goods while not relinquishing the mass; but what it gives, it gives away and has no longer. Christ introduces into the enjoyment of that which is His own — of His own position before the Father.\* The world does not and cannot give in this manner. How perfect must that peace have been which He enjoyed with the Father — that peace He gives to us — His own!

[\* This is blessedly true in every respect, except of course essential Godhead and oneness with the Father: in this He remains divinely alone. But all He has as man, and as Son in manhood, He introduces into, “My Father and your Father, my God and your God.” His peace, His joy, the words the Father gave to Him, He has given to us; the glory given to Him He has given to us; with the love wherewith the Father has loved Him we are loved. The counsels of God were not merely to meet our responsibility as children of Adam, but before the world to put us into the same position with the second Adam, His own Son. And Christ’s work has made that to be righteousness.]

There remains yet one precious thought — a proof of unspeakable grace in Jesus. He so reckons upon our affection, and this as personal to Himself, that He says to them, “If ye loved me ye would rejoice, because I said, I go

unto the Father.” He gives us to be interested in His own glory, in His happiness, and, in it, to find our own.

Good and precious Savior, we do indeed rejoice that Thou, who hast suffered so much for us, hast now fulfilled all things, and art at rest with Thy Father, whatever may be Thine active love for us. Oh that we knew and loved Thee better! But still we can say in fullness of heart, Come quickly, Lord! Leave once more the throne of Thy rest and of Thy personal glory, to come and take us to Thyself, that all may be fulfilled for us also, and that we may be with Thee and in the light of Thy Father’s countenance and in His house. Thy grace is infinite, but Thy presence and the joy of the Father shall be the rest of our hearts, and our eternal joy.

Here the Lord closes this part of His discourse.\* He had shown them as a whole all that flowed from His departure and from His death. The glory of His Person, observe, is always here the subject; for, even with regard to His death, it is said, “Now is the Son of man glorified.” Nevertheless He had forewarned them of it, that it might strengthen and not weaken their faith, for He would not talk much more with them. The world was under the power of the enemy, and he was coming: not because he had anything in Christ — he had nothing — therefore he had not even the power of death over Him. His death was not the effect of the power of Satan over Him, but thereby He showed the world that He loved the Father; and He was obedient to the Father, cost what it would. And this was absolute perfection in man. If Satan was the prince of this world, Jesus did not seek to maintain His Messiah glory in it. But He showed to the world, there where Satan’s power was, the fullness of grace and of perfection in His own Person; in order that the world might come from itself (if I may use such an expression) those at least, who had ears to hear.

[\* Chapter 14 gives to us the Son’s personal relationship with the Father, and our place in Him who is in it, known by the Holy Ghost given. In chapter 15 we have His place and standing on earth, the true Vine, and then His state of glory as exalted and sending the Comforter to reveal that.]

The Lord then ceases to speak, and goes forth. He is no longer seated with His own, as of this world. He arises and quits it.

That which we have said of the Lord’s commandments, given during His sojourn here below (a thought to which the succeeding chapters will give

interesting development) helps us much in understanding the Lord's whole discourse here to the end of chapter 16. The subject is divided into two principal parts: — The action of the Holy Ghost when the Lord should be away; and the relationship of the disciples to Him during His stay upon the earth. On the one hand, that which flowed from His exaltation to the right hand of God (which raised Him above the question of Jew and Gentile); and, on the other, that which depended on His presence upon earth, as necessarily centering all the promises in His own Person, and the relations of His own with Himself, viewed as in connection with the earth and themselves in it, even when He should be absent. There were, in consequence, two kinds of testimony: that of the Holy Ghost, strictly speaking (that is, what He revealed in reference to Jesus ascended on high); and that of the disciples themselves, as eye-witnesses to all that they had seen of Jesus on the earth (chap. 15:26, 27). Not that for this purpose they were without the help of the Holy Ghost; but the latter was not the new testimony of the heavenly glory by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. He brought to their remembrance that which Jesus had been, and that which He had spoken, while on earth. Therefore, in the passage we have been reading, His work is thus described (chap. 14:26): "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you" (compare v. 25). The two works of the Holy Ghost are here presented. Jesus had spoken many things unto them. The Holy Ghost would teach them all things; moreover, He would bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had said. In chapter 16:12, 13, Jesus tells them that He had many things to say, but that they could not bear them then. Afterwards, the Spirit of truth should lead them into all truth. He should not speak from Himself; but whatsoever He should hear, that should He speak. He was not like an individual spirit, who speaks on his own account. One with the Father and the Son, and come down to reveal the glory and the counsels of God, all His communications would be in connection with them, revealing the glory of Christ ascended on high — of Christ, to whom belonged all that the Father had. Here it is no question of recalling all that Jesus had said upon earth: all is heavenly in connection with that which is on high, and with the full glory of Jesus, or else relates to the future purposes of God. We shall return to this subject by-and-by. I have said these few words to mark the distinctions which I have pointed out.

**CHAPTER 15.** The beginning of this chapter, and that which relates to the vine, belongs to the earthly portion — to that which Jesus was on earth — to His relationship with His disciples as on the earth, and does not go beyond that position.

“I am the true vine.” Jehovah had planted a vine brought out of Egypt (Psalm 80:8). This is Israel after the flesh; but it was not the true Vine. The true Vine was His Son, whom He brought up out of Egypt — Jesus.\* He presents Himself thus to His disciples. Here it is not that which He will be after His departure; He was this upon earth, and distinctively upon earth. We do not speak of planting vines in heaven, nor of pruning branches there.

[\* Compare, for this substitution of Christ for Israel, Isaiah 49. He began Israel over again in blessing, as He did man.]

The disciples would have considered Him as the most excellent branch of the Vine; but thus He would have been only a member of Israel, whereas He was Himself the vessel, the source of blessing, according to the promises of God. The true Vine, therefore, is not Israel; quite the contrary, it is Christ in contrast with Israel, but Christ planted on earth, taking Israel’s place, as the true Vine. The Father cultivates this plant, evidently on the earth. There is no need of a husbandman in heaven. Those who are attached to Christ, as the remnant of Israel, the disciples, need this culture. It is on the earth that fruit-bearing is looked for. The Lord therefore says to them, “Ye are clean already, through the word which I have spoken unto you”; “Ye are the branches.” Judas, perhaps it may be said, was taken away, so the disciples who walked no more with Him. The others should be proved and cleansed, that they might bear more fruit.

I do not doubt that this relationship, in principle and in a general analogy, still subsists. Those who make a profession, who attach themselves to Christ in order to follow Him, will, if there is life, be cleansed; if not, that which they have will be taken away. Observe therefore here, that the Lord speaks only of His word — that of the true prophet — and of judgment, whether in discipline or in cutting off. Consequently He speaks not of the power of God, but of the responsibility of man a responsibility which man will certainly not be able to meet without grace; but which has nevertheless that character of personal responsibility here.

Jesus was the source of all their strength. They were to abide in Him; thus — for this is the order — He would abide in them. We have seen this in chapter 14. He does not speak here of the sovereign exercise of love in salvation, but of the government of children by their Father; so that blessing depends on walk (v. 21, 23). Here the husbandman seeks for fruit; but the instruction given presents entire dependence on the Vine as the means of producing it. And He shows the disciples that, walking on earth, they should be pruned by the Father, and a man (for in verse 6 He carefully changes the expression, for He knew the disciples and had pronounced them already clean) a man, any one who bore no fruit, would be cut off. For the subject here is not that relationship with Christ in heaven by the Holy Ghost, which cannot be broken, but of that link which even then was formed here below, which might be vital and eternal, or which might not. Fruit should be the proof.

In the former vine this was not necessary; they were Jews by birth, they were circumcised, they kept the ordinances, and abode in the vine as good branches, without bearing any fruit at all. They were only cut off from Israel for willful violation of the law. Here it is not a relationship with Jehovah founded on the circumstance of being born of a certain family. That which is looked for is the glorifying the Father by fruit-bearing. It is this which will show that they are the disciples of Him who has born so much.

Christ, then, was the true Vine; the Father, the Husbandman; the eleven were the branches. They were to abide in Him, which is realised by not thinking to produce any fruit except as in Him, looking to Him first. Christ precedes fruit. It is dependence, practical habitual nearness of heart to Him, and trust in Him, being attached to Him through dependence on Him. In this way Christ in them would be a constant source of strength and of fruit. He would be in them. Out of Him they could do nothing. If, by abiding in Him, they had the strength of His presence, they should bear much fruit. Moreover, “if a man” (He does not say “they”; He knew them as true branches and clean) did not abide in Him, he should be cast forth to be burnt. Again, if they abode in Him (that is, if there was the constant dependence that draws from the source), and if the words of Christ abode in them, directing their hearts and thoughts, they should command the resources of divine power; they should ask what they would, and it should



be done. But, further, the Father had loved the Son divinely while He dwelt on earth. Jesus did the same with regard to them. They were to abide in His love. In the former verses it was in Him, here it is in His love.\* By keeping His Father's commandments, He had abode in His love; by keeping the commandments of Jesus, they should abide in His.

Dependence (which implies confidence, and reference to Him on whom we depend for strength, as unable to do anything without Him, and so clinging close to Him) and obedience, are the two great principles of practical life here below. Thus Jesus walked as man: He knew by experience the true path for His disciples. The commandments of His Father were the expression of what the Father was; by keeping them in the spirit of obedience, Jesus had ever walked in the communion of His love; had maintained communion with Himself. The commandments of Jesus when on earth were the expression of what He was, divinely perfect in the path of man. By walking in them, His disciples should be in the communion of His love. The Lord spoke these things to His disciples, in order that His joy\*\* should abide in them, and that their joy should be full.

[\* There are the three exhortations: Abide in me; If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you ye shall ask what ye will; Abide in My love.]

[\*\* Some have thought that this means the joy of Christ in the faithful walk of a disciple: I do not think so. It is the joy He had down here, just as He left us His own peace, and will give us His own glory.]

We see that it is not the salvation of a sinner that is the subject treated of here, but the path of a disciple, in order that he may fully enjoy the love of Christ, and that his heart may be unclouded in the place where joy is found.

Neither is the question entered on here, whether a real believer can be separated from God, because the Lord makes obedience the means of abiding in His love. Assuredly He could not lose the favor of His Father, or cease to be the object of His love. That was out of the question; and yet He says, "I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." But this was the divine path in which He enjoyed it. It is the walk and the strength of a disciple that is spoken of, and not the means of salvation.

At verse 12 another part of the subject begins. He wills (this is His commandment) that they should love one another, as He had loved them. Before, He had spoken of the Father's love for Him, which flowed from

heaven into His heart here below.\* He had loved them in this same way; but He had also been a companion, a servant, in this love. Thus the disciples were to love one another with a love that rose above all the weaknesses of others, and which was at the same time brotherly, and caused the one who felt it to be the servant of his brother. It went so far as to lay down life itself for one's friends. Now, to Jesus, he who obeyed Him was His friend. Observe, He does not say that He would be their friend. He was our friend when He gave His life for sinners: we are His friends when we enjoy His confidence, as He here expresses it — "I have told you all things that I have heard of my Father." Men speak of their affairs, according to the necessity of doing so which may arise, to those who are concerned in them. I impart all my own thoughts to one who is my friend. "Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I will do?" and Abraham was called the "friend of God." Now it was not things concerning Abraham himself that God then told Abraham (He had done so as God), but things concerning the world — Sodom. God does the same with respect to the assembly, practically with respect to the obedient disciple: such a one should be the depositary of His thoughts. Moreover, He had chosen them for this. It was not they who had chosen Him by the exercise of their own will. He had chosen them and ordained them to go and bring forth fruit, and fruit that should remain; so that, being thus chosen of Christ for the work, they should receive from the Father, who could not fail them in this case, whatsoever they should ask. Here the Lord comes to the source and certainty of grace, in order that the practical responsibility, under which He puts them, should not cloud the divine grace which acted towards them and placed them there.

[\* He does not say "loveth me," but "hath loved me"; that is, He does not speak merely of the eternal love of the Father for the Son, but of the Father's love displayed towards Him in His humanity here on earth.]

They were therefore to love one another.\* That the world should hate them was but the natural consequence of its hatred to Christ; it sealed their association with Him. The world loves that which is of the world: this is quite natural. The disciples were not of it; and, besides, the Jesus whom it had rejected had chosen them and separated them from the world: therefore it would hate them because so chosen in grace. There was, besides, the moral reason, namely, that they were not of it; but this demonstrated their relationship to Christ, and His sovereign rights, by which He had taken

them to Himself out of a rebellious world. They should have the same portion as their Master: it should be for His name's sake, because the world — and He speaks especially of the Jews, among whom He had labored — knew not the Father who had sent Him in love. To make their boast of Jehovah, as their God, suited them very well. They would have received the Messiah on that footing. To know the Father, revealed in His true character by the Son, was quite a different thing. Nevertheless the Son had revealed Him, and, both by His words and His works, had manifested the Father and His perfections.

[\* By choosing them and setting them apart to enjoy together this relationship with Him outside the world, He had put them in a position of which mutual love was the natural consequence; and, in fact, the sense of this position and love go together.]

If Christ had not come and spoken unto them, God would not have had to reproach them with sin. They might still drag on, even if in an unpurged state, without any proof (though there was plenty of sin and transgression as men and as a people under the law) that they would not have God — would not even by mercy return. The fruit of a fallen nature was there, no doubt, but not the proof that that nature preferred sin to God, when God was there in mercy, not imputing it. Grace was dealing with them, not imputing sin to them. Mercy had been treating them as fallen, not as willful creatures. God was not taking the ground of law, which imputes, or of judgment, but of grace in the revelation of the Father by the Son. The words and works of the Son revealing the Father in grace, rejected, left them without hope (compare chap. 16:9). Their real condition would otherwise not have been thoroughly tested, God would have had still a means to use; He loved Israel too much to condemn them while there was one left untried.

If the Lord had not done among them the works which no other man had done, they might have remained as they were, refused to believe in Him, and not have been guilty before God. They would have been still the object of Jehovah's long — suffering; but in fact they had seen and hated both the Son and the Father. The Father had been fully manifested in the Son — in Jesus; and if, when God was fully manifested, and in grace, they rejected Him, what could be done except to leave them in sin, afar from God? If He had been manifested only in part, they would have had an excuse; they

might have said, “Ah! if He had shown grace, if we had known Him as He is, we would not have rejected Him.” They could not now say this. They had seen the Father and the Son in Jesus. Alas! they had seen and hated.\*

[\* Remark, that His word and His works are here again referred to.]

But this was only the fulfillment of that which was foretold of them in their law. As to the testimony born to God by the people, and of a Messiah received by them, all was over. They had hated Him without a cause.

The Lord now turns to the subject of the Holy Ghost who should come to maintain His glory, which the people had cast down to the ground. The Jews had not known the Father manifested in the Son; the Holy Ghost should now come from the Father to bear witness of the Son. The Son should send Him from the Father. In chapter 14 the Father sends Him in Jesus’ name for the personal relationship of the disciples with Jesus. Here Jesus, gone on high, sends Him the witness of His exalted glory, His heavenly place. This was the new testimony, and was to be rendered unto Jesus, the Son of God, ascended up to heaven. The disciples also should bear witness of Him, because they had been with Him from the beginning. They were to testify with the help of the Holy Ghost, as eyewitnesses of His life on earth, of the manifestation of the Father in Him. The Holy Ghost, sent by Him, was the witness to His glory with the Father, whence He Himself had come.

Thus in Christ, the true Vine, we have the disciples, the branches, clean already, Christ being still present on the earth. After His departure they were to maintain this practical relationship. They should be in relationship with Him, as He, here below, had been with the Father. And they were to be with one another as He had been with them. Their position was outside the world. Now the Jews had hated both the Son and the Father; the Holy Ghost should bear witness to the Son as with the Father, and in the Father; and the disciples should testify also of that which He had been on earth.

The Holy Ghost, and, in a certain sense, the disciples take the place of Jesus, as well as of the old vine, on the earth.

The presence and the testimony of the Holy Ghost on earth are now developed.

It is well to notice the connection of the subjects in the passages we are considering. In chapter 14 we have the Person of the Son revealing the Father, and the Holy Ghost giving the knowledge of the Son's being in the Father and the disciples in Jesus on high. This was the personal condition both of Christ and the disciples, and is all linked together; only first the Father, the Son being down here, and then the Holy Ghost sent by the Father. In chapters 15, 16 you get the distinct dispensations — Christ the true Vine on earth, and then the Comforter come on earth sent down by the exalted Christ. In chapter 14 Christ prays the Father, who sends the Spirit in Christ's name. In chapter 15 Christ exalted sends the Spirit from the Father, a witness of His exaltation, as the disciples, led by the Spirit, were of His life of humiliation, but as Son on earth.

Nevertheless there is development as well as connection. In chapter 14 the Lord, although quitting the earth, speaks in connection with that which He was upon earth. It is (not Christ Himself) the Father who sends the Holy Ghost at His request. He goes from earth to heaven on their part as Mediator. He would pray the Father, and the Father would give them another Comforter, who should continue with them, not leaving them as He was doing. Their relationship to the Father depending on Him, it would be as believing in Him that He would be sent to them — not to the world — not upon Jews, as such. It should be in His name. Moreover the Holy Ghost would Himself teach them, and He would recall to their mind the commandments of Jesus — all that He had said unto them. For chapter 14 gives the whole position that resulted from the manifestation\* of the Son, and that of the Father in Him, and from His departure (that is to say, its results with regard to the disciples).

[\* Observe here the practical development, with respect to life, of this most deeply interesting subject, in 1 John 1 and 2. The eternal life which was with the Father had been manifested (for in Him, in the Son, was life, He was also the Word of life, and God was light. Compare John 1). They were to keep His commandments (chap. 2:3-5). It was an old commandment which they had had from the beginning — that is, from Jesus on earth, from Him whom their hands had handled. But now this commandment was true in Him and in them: that is to say, this life of love (of which these commandments were the expression) as well as that of righteousness reproduced itself in them, by virtue of their union with Him, through the Holy Ghost, according to John 14:20. They also abode in Jesus (1 John 2:6). In John 1 we find the Son who is in the bosom of the Father, who declares Him. He reveals Him as He has thus known Him — as that which the Father was to Himself. And He has brought this love (of which He was

the object) down into the bosom of humanity, and placed it in the heart of His disciples (see chapter 17:26); and this is known now in perfection by God dwelling in us, and His love being perfect in us, while we dwell in brotherly love (1 John 4:12; compare John 1:18). The manifestation of our having been thus loved will consist in our appearing in the same glory as Christ (chap. 17:22, 23). Christ manifests this love by coming from the Father. His commandments teach it us; the life which we have in Him reproduces it. His precepts give form to this life, and guide it through the ways of the flesh, and the temptations in the midst of which He, without sin, lived by this life. The Holy Ghost is its strength, as being the mighty and living link with Him, and He by whom we are consciously in Him and He in us. (Union, as the body to the Head, is another thing, which is never the subject of John's teaching.) Of His fullness we receive grace upon grace. Therefore it is that we ought to walk as He walked (not to be what He was); for we ought not to walk in the flesh, although it is in us and was not in Him.]

Now, in chapter 15 He had exhausted the subject of commandments in connection with the life manifested in Himself here below; and at the close of this chapter He considers Himself as ascended, and He adds, "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father." He comes, indeed, from the Father; for our relationship is, and ought to be, immediate to Him. It is there that Christ has placed us. But in this verse it is not the Father who sends Him at the request of Jesus, and in His name. Christ has taken His place in glory as Son of man, and according to the glorious fruits of His work, and He sends Him. Consequently He bears witness to that which Christ is in heaven. No doubt He makes us perceive what Jesus was here below, where in infinite grace He manifested the Father, and perceive it much better than they did, who were with Him during His sojourn on earth. But this is in chapter 14. Nevertheless the Holy Ghost is sent by Christ from heaven, and He reveals to us the Son, whom now we know as having perfectly and divinely (albeit as man and amid sinful men) manifested the Father. We know, I repeat, the Son, as with the Father, and in the Father. From thence it is He has sent us the Holy Ghost.

In **CHAPTER 16** a further step is taken in the revelation of this grace. The Holy Ghost is looked upon as already here below.

In this chapter the Lord declares that He has set forth all His instruction with regard to His departure; their sufferings in the world as holding His place; their joy, as being in the same relationship to Him as that in which He had been while on earth to His Father; their knowledge of the fact that

He was in the Father and they in Him, and He Himself in them; the gift of the Holy Ghost, in order to prepare them for all that would happen when He was gone, that they might not be offended. For they should be cast out of the synagogues, and he who should kill them would think that he was serving God. This would be the case with those who, resting in their old doctrines as a form, and rejecting the light, would only use the form of truth by which they accredited the flesh as orthodox to resist the light which, according to the Spirit, would judge the flesh. This would they do, because they knew neither the Father nor Jesus, the Son of the Father. It is fresh truth which tests the soul, and faith. Old truth, generally received and by which a body of people are distinguished from those around them, may be a subject of pride to the flesh, even where it is the truth, as was the case with the Jews. But fresh truth is a question of faith in its source: there is not the support of a body accredited by it, but the cross of hostility and isolation. They thought they served God. They knew not the Father and the Son.

Nature is occupied with that which it loses. Faith looks at the future into which God leads. Precious thought! Nature acted in the disciples: they loved Jesus; they grieved at His going away. We can understand this. But faith would not have stopped there. If they had apprehended the necessary glory of the Person of Jesus; if their affection, animated by faith, had thought of Him and not of themselves, they would have asked, "Whither goest thou?" Nevertheless He who thought of them assures them that it would be gain to them even to lose Him. Glorious fruit of the ways of God! Their gain would be in this, that the Comforter should be here on earth with them and in them. Here, observe, Jesus does not speak of the Father. It was the Comforter here below in His stead, to maintain the testimony of His love for the disciples, and His relationship to them. Christ was going away: for if He went not away, the Comforter would not come; but if He departed, He would send Him. When He was come, He would act in demonstration of the truth with regard to the world that rejected Christ and persecuted His disciples; and He would act for blessing in the disciples themselves.

With regard to the world, the Comforter had one only subject of testimony, in order to demonstrate the sin of the world. It has not believed in Jesus — in the Son. Doubtless there was sin of every kind, and, to

speak truth, nothing but sin — sin that deserved judgment; and in the work of conversion, He brings these sins home to the soul. But the rejection of Christ put the whole world under one common judgment. No doubt every one shall answer for his sins; and the Holy Ghost makes me feel them. But, as a system responsible to God, the world had rejected His Son. This was the ground on which God dealt with the world now; this it was which made manifest the heart of man. It was the demonstration that, God being fully revealed in love such as He was, man would not receive Him. He came, not imputing their trespasses unto them; but they rejected Him. The presence of Jesus was not the Son of God Himself manifested in His glory, from which man might shrink with fear, though he could not escape; it was what He was morally, in His nature, in His character. Man hated Him: all testimony to bring man to God was unavailing. The plainer the testimony, the more he turned from it and opposed it. The demonstration of the sin of the world was its having rejected Christ. Terrible testimony, that God in goodness should excite detestation because He was perfect, and perfectly good! Such is man. The testimony of the Holy Ghost to the world, as God's to Cain of old, would be, Where is my Son? It was not that man was guilty; that he was when Christ came; but he was lost, the tree was bad.\*

[\* Man is judged for what he has done; he is lost by what he is.]

But this was God's path to something altogether different — the demonstration of righteousness, in that Christ went to His Father, and the world saw Him no more. It was the result of Christ's rejection. Human righteousness there was none. Man's sin was proved by the rejection of Christ. The cross was indeed judgment executed upon sin. And in that sense it was righteousness; but in this world it was the only righteous One condemned by man and forsaken by God; it was not the manifestation of righteousness. It was a final judicial separation between man and God (see chapters 11 and 12:31). If Christ had been delivered there, and had become the King of Israel, this would not have been an adequate consequence of His having glorified God. Having glorified God His Father, He was going to sit at His right hand, at the right hand of the Majesty on high, to be glorified in God Himself, to sit on the Father's throne. To set Him there was divine righteousness (see chapter 13:31, 32, and 17:1, 4, 5). This same righteousness deprived the world, as it is, of Jesus for ever. Man saw Him



no more. Righteousness in favor of men was in Christ at God's right hand — in judgment as to the world, in that it had lost Him hopelessly and for ever.

Moreover Satan had been proved to be the prince of this world by leading all men against the Lord Jesus. To accomplish the purposes of God in grace, Jesus does not resist. He gives Himself up to death. He who has the power of death committed himself thoroughly. In his desire to ruin man he had to hazard everything in his enterprise against the Prince of Life. He was able to associate the whole world with himself in this, Jew and Gentile, priest and people, governor, soldier, and subject. The world was there, headed by its prince, on that solemn day. The enemy had everything at stake, and the world was with him. But Christ has risen, He has ascended to His Father, and has sent down the Holy Ghost. All the motives that govern the world, and the power by which Satan held men captive, are shown to be of him; he is judged. The power of the Holy Ghost is the testimony of this, and surmounts all the powers of the enemy. The world is not yet judged, that is, the judgment executed — it will be in another manner; but it is morally, its prince is judged. All its motives, religious and irreligious, have led it to reject Christ, placing it under Satan's power. It is in that character that he has been judged; for he led the world against Him who is manifested to be the Son of God by the presence of the Holy Ghost consequent on His breaking the power of Satan in death.

All this took place through the presence on earth of the Holy Ghost, sent down by Christ. His presence in itself was the demonstration of these three things. For, if the Holy Ghost was here, it was because the world had rejected the Son of God. Righteousness was evidenced by Jesus being at the right hand of God, of which the presence of the Holy Ghost was the proof, as well as in the fact that the world had lost Him. Now the world which rejected Him was not outwardly judged, but, Satan having led it to reject the Son, the presence of the Holy Ghost proved that Jesus had destroyed the power of death; that he who had possessed that power was thus judged; that he had shown himself to be the enemy of Him whom the Father owned; that his power was gone, and victory belonged to the Second Adam, when Satan's whole power had been arrayed against the

human weakness of Him who in love had yielded to it. But Satan, thus judged, was the prince of this world.

The presence of the Holy Ghost should be the demonstration not of Christ's rights as Messiah, true as they were, but of those truths that related to man — to the world, in which Israel was now lost, having rejected the promises, although God would preserve the nation for Himself. But the Holy Ghost was doing something more than demonstrating the condition of the world. He would accomplish a work in the disciples; He would lead them into all truth, and He would show them things to come; for Jesus had many things to tell them which they were not yet able to bear. When the Holy Ghost should be in them, He should be their strength in them as well as their teacher; and it would be a wholly different state of things for the disciples. Here He is considered as present on the earth in place of Jesus, and dwelling in the disciples, not as an individual spirit speaking from Himself, but even as Jesus said, "As I hear I judge," with a judgment perfectly divine and heavenly: so the Holy Ghost, acting in the disciples, would speak that which came from above, and of the future, according to divine knowledge. It should be heaven and the future of which He would speak, communicating what was heavenly from above, and revealing events to come upon the earth, the one and the other being witnesses that it was a knowledge which belonged to God. How blessed to have that which He has to give!

But, further, He takes here the place of Christ. Jesus had glorified the Father on earth. The Holy Ghost would glorify Jesus, with reference to the glory that belonged to His Person and to His position. He does not here speak directly of the glory of the Father. The disciples had seen the glory of the life of Christ on earth; the Holy Ghost would unfold to them His glory in that which belonged to Him as glorified with the Father — that which was His own.

They would learn "in part." This is man's measure when the things of God are in question, but its extent is declared by the Lord Himself: "He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. An that the Father hath is mine: therefore, said I, He shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you."

Thus we have the gift of the Holy Ghost variously presented in connection with Christ. In dependence on His Father, and representing His disciples as gone up from among them, on their behalf, He addresses Himself to the Father; He asks the Father to send the Holy Ghost (chap. 14:16). Afterwards we find that His own name is all powerful. All blessing from the Father comes in His name. It is on His account, and according to the efficacy of His name, of all that in Him is acceptable to the Father, that good comes to us. Thus the Father will send the Holy Ghost in His name (chap. 14:26). And Christ being glorified on high, and having taken His place with His Father, He Himself sends the Holy Ghost (chap. 15:26) from the Father, as proceeding from Him. Finally, the Holy Ghost is present here in this world, in and with the disciples, and He glorifies Jesus, and takes of His and reveals it to His own (chap. 16:13-15). Here all the glory of the Person of Christ is set forth, as well as the rights belonging to the position He has taken. "All things that the Father hath" are His. He has taken His position according to the eternal counsels of God, in virtue of His work as Son of man. But if He has entered into possession in this character, all that He possesses in it is His, as a Son to whom (being one with the Father) all that the Father has belongs.

There He should be hidden for a while: the disciples should afterwards see Him, for it was only the accomplishment of the ways of God; it was no question of being, as it were, lost by death. He was going to His Father. On this point the disciples understood nothing. The Lord develops the fact and its consequences, without yet showing them the whole import of what He said. He takes it up on the human and historical side. The world would rejoice at having got rid of Him. Miserable joy! The disciples would lament, although it was the true source of joy for them; but their sorrow should be turned into joy. As testimony, this took place when He showed Himself to them after His resurrection; it will be fully accomplished when He shall return to receive them unto Himself. But when they had seen Him again, they should understand the relationship in which He has placed them with His Father, they should enjoy it by the Holy Ghost. It should not be as though they could not themselves draw nigh to the Father, while Christ could do so (as Martha said, "I know that whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, he will give it thee"). They might themselves go directly to the Father, who loved them, because they had believed in Jesus, and had

received Him when He had humbled Himself in this world of sin (in principle it is always thus); and asking what they would in His name they should receive it, so that their joy might be full in the consciousness of the blessed position of unfailing favor into which they were brought, and of the value of all that they possessed in Christ.

Nevertheless the Lord already declares to them the basis of the truth — He came from the Father, He was going away to the Father. The disciples think they understand that which He had thus spoken without a parable. They felt that He had divined their thought, for they had not expressed it to Him. Yet they did not rise really to the height of what He said. He had told them that they had believed in His having come “from God.” This they understood; and that which had taken place had confirmed them in this faith, and they declare their conviction with regard to this truth; but they do not enter into the thought of coming “from the Father,” and going away “to the Father.” They fancied themselves quite in the light; but they had apprehended nothing that raised them above the effect of Christ’s rejection, which the belief that He came from the Father and was going to the Father would have done. Jesus therefore declares to them, that His death would scatter them, and that they would forsake Him. His Father would be with Him; He should not be alone. Nevertheless He had explained all these things to them, in order that they should have peace in Him. In the world that rejected Him they should have tribulation; but He had overcome the world, they might be of good cheer.

This ends the conversation of Jesus with His disciples on earth. In the following chapter He addresses His Father as taking His own place in departing, and giving His disciples theirs (that is, His own), with regard to the Father and to the world, after He had gone away to be glorified with the Father. The whole chapter is essentially putting the disciples in His own place, after laying the ground for it in His own glorifying and work. It is, save the last verses, His place on earth. As He was divinely in heaven, and so showed a divine heavenly character on earth, so (He being glorified as man in heaven) they, united with Him, were in turn to display the same. Hence we have first the place He personally takes, and the work which entitles them to be in it.

**CHAPTER 17** is divided thus: Verses 1-5 relate to Christ Himself, to His taking His position in glory, to His work, and to that glory as belonging to His Person, and the result of His work. Verses 1-3 present His new position in two aspects: “glorify thy Son” — power over all flesh, for eternal life to those given to Him; verses 4, 5, His work and its results. In verses 6-13 He speaks of His disciples as put into this relationship with the Father by His revealing His name to them, and then His having given them the words which He had Himself received, that they might enjoy all the full blessedness of this relationship. He also prays for them that they may be one as He and the Father were. In verses 14-21 we find their consequent relationship to the world; in verses 20, 21, He introduces those who should believe through their means into the enjoyment of their blessing. Verses 22-26 make known the result, both future, and in this world, for them: the possession of the glory which Christ Himself had received from the Father — to be with Him, enjoying the sight of His glory — that the Father’s love should be with them here below, even as Christ Himself had been its object — and that Christ Himself should be in them. The last three verses alone take the disciples up to heaven as a supplemental truth.

This is a brief summary of this marvelous chapter, in which we are admitted, not to the discourse of Christ with man, but to hear the desires of His heart, when He pours it out to His Father for the blessing of those that are His own. Wonderful grace that permits us to hear these desires, and to understand all the privileges that flow from His thus caring for us, from our being the subject of intercourse between the Father and the Son, of their common love towards us, when Christ expresses His own desires — that which He has at heart, and which He presents to the Father as His own personal wishes!

Some explanations may assist in apprehending the meaning of certain passages in this marvelous and precious chapter. May the Spirit of God aid us!

The Lord, whose looks of love had until then been directed towards His disciples on the earth, now lifts His eyes to heaven as He addresses His Father. The hour was come to glorify the Son, in order that from the glory He might glorify the Father. This is, speaking generally, the new position.

His career here was finished, and He had to ascend on high. Two things were connected with this — power over all flesh, and the gift of eternal life to as many as the Father had given Him. “The head of every man is Christ.” Those whom the Father had given Him receive eternal life from Him who has gone up on high. Eternal life was the knowledge of the Father, the only true God, and of Jesus Christ, whom He had sent. The knowledge of the Almighty gave assurance to the pilgrim of faith; that of Jehovah, the certainty of the fulfillment of the promises of God to Israel; that of the Father, who sent the Son, Jesus Christ (the Anointed Man and the Savior), who was that life itself, and so received as a present thing (1 John 1:1-4), was life eternal. True knowledge here was not outward protection or future hope, but the communication, in life, of communion with the Being thus known to the soul — of communion with God Himself fully known as the Father and the Son. Here it is not the divinity of His Person that is before us in Christ, though a divine Person alone could be in such a place and so speak, but the place that He had taken in fulfilling the counsels of God. That which is said of Jesus in this chapter could only be said of One who is God; but the point treated is that of His place in the counsels of God, and not the revelation of His nature. He receives all from His Father — He is sent by Him, His Father glorifies Him.\* We see the same truth of the communication of eternal life in connection with His divine nature and His oneness with the Father in 1 John 5:20. Here He fulfills the Father’s will, and is dependent on Him in the place that He has taken, and that He is going to take, even in the glory, however glorious His nature may be. So, also, in chapter 5 of our Gospel, He quickens whom He will; here it is those whom the Father has given Him. And the life He gives is realised in the knowledge of the Father, and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

[\* The more we examine the Gospel of John, the more we shall see One who speaks and acts as a divine Person — one with the Father — alone could do, but yet always as One who had taken the place of a servant, and takes nothing to Himself, but receives all from His Father. “I have glorified thee”: “now glorify me.” What language of equality of nature and love! but He does not say, And now I will glorify myself. He has taken the place of man to receive all, though it be a glory He had with the Father before the world was. This is of exquisite beauty. I add, it was out of this the enemy sought to seduce Him, in vain, in the wilderness.]

He now declares the conditions under which He takes this place on high. He had perfectly glorified the Father on earth. Nothing that manifested God the Father had been wanting, whatever might be the difficulty; the contradiction of sinners was but an occasion of so doing. But this very thing made the sorrow infinite. Nevertheless Jesus had accomplished that glory on the earth in the face of all that opposed itself. His glory with the Father in heaven was but the just consequence — the necessary consequence, in mere justice. Moreover Jesus had had this glory with His Father before the world was. His work and His Person alike gave Him a right to it. The Father glorified on earth by the Son: the Son glorified with the Father on high: such is the revelation contained in these verses — a right, proceeding from His Person as Son, but to a glory into which He entered as man, in consequence of having, as such, perfectly glorified His Father on earth. These are the verses that relate to Christ. This, moreover, gives the relationship in which He enters into this new place as man, His Son, and the work by which He does so in righteousness, and thus gives us a title, and the character in which we have a place there.

He now speaks of the disciples; how they entered into their peculiar place in connection with this position of Jesus — into this relationship with His Father. He had manifested the Father's name to those whom the Father had given Him out of the world. They belonged to the Father, and the Father had given them to Jesus. They had kept the Father's word. It was faith in the revelation which the Son had made of the Father. The words of the prophets were true. The faithful enjoyed them: they sustained their faith. But the word of the Father, by Jesus, revealed the Father Himself, in Him whom the Father had sent, and put him who received them into the place of love, which was Christ's place; and to know the Father and the Son was life eternal. This was quite another thing from hopes connected with the Messiah or what Jehovah had given Him. It is thus, also, that the disciples are presented to the Father; not as receiving Christ in the character of Messiah, and honoring Him as possessing His power by that title. They had known that all which Jesus had was of the Father. He was then the Son; His relationship to the Father was acknowledged. Dull of comprehension as they were, the Lord recognises them according to His appreciation of their faith, according to the object of that faith, as known

to Himself, and not according to their intelligence. Precious truth! (compare chap. 14:7).

They acknowledged Jesus, then, as receiving all from the Father, not as Messiah from Jehovah; for Jesus had given them all the words that the Father had given Him. Thus He had brought them in their own souls into the consciousness of the relationship between the Son and the Father, and into full communion, according to the communications of the Father to the Son in that relationship. He speaks of their position through faith — not of their realisation of this position. Thus they had acknowledged that Jesus came forth from the Father, and that He came with the Father's authority — the Father had sent Him. It was from thence He came, and He came furnished with the authority of a mission from the Father. This was their position by faith.

And now — the disciples being already in this position — He places them, according to His thoughts and His desires, before the Father in prayer. He prays for them, distinguishing them completely from the world. The time would come when (according to Psalm 2) He would ask of the Father with reference to the world; He was not doing so now, but for those out of the world, whom the Father had given Him. For they were the Father's. For all that is the Father's is in essential opposition to the world (compare 1 John 2:16).

The Lord presents to the Father two motives for His request: — 1st, They were the Father's, so that the Father, for His own glory, and because of His affection for that which belonged to Him, should keep them; 2nd, Jesus was glorified in them, so that if Jesus was the object of the Father's affection, for that reason also the Father should keep them. Besides, the interests of the Father and the Son could not be separated. If they were the Father's they were, in fact, the Son's; and it was but an example of that universal truth — all that was the Son's was the Father's, and all that was the Father's was the Son's. What a place for us! to be the object of this mutual affection, of these common and inseparable interests of the Father and the Son. This is the great principle — the great foundation of the prayer of Christ. He prayed the Father for His disciples, because they belonged to the Father; Jesus must needs, therefore, seek their blessing.



The Father would be thoroughly interested for them, because in them the Son was to be glorified.

He then presents the circumstances to which the prayer applied. He was no longer in this world Himself. They would be deprived of His personal care as present with them, but they would be in this world, while He was coming to the Father. This is the ground of His request with regard to their position. He puts them in connection, therefore, with the Holy Father — all the perfect love of such a Father — the Father of Jesus and their Father, maintaining (it was their blessing) the holiness that His nature required, if they were to be in relationship with Him. It was direct guardianship. The Father would keep in His own name those whom He had given to Jesus. The connection thus was direct. Jesus committed them to Him, and that, not only as belonging to the Father, but now as His own, invested with all the value which that would give them in the Father's eyes.

The object of His solicitude was to keep them in unity, even as the Father and the Son are one. One only divine Spirit was the bond of that oneness. In this sense the bond was truly divine. So far as they were filled with the Holy Spirit, they had but one mind, one counsel, one aim. This is the unity referred to here. The Father and the Son were their only object; the accomplishing their counsels and objects their only pursuit. They had only the thoughts of God; because God Himself, the Holy Ghost, was the source of their thoughts. It was one only divine power and nature that united them — the Holy Ghost. The mind, the aim, the life, the whole moral existence, were consequently one. The Lord speaks, necessarily, at the height of His own thoughts, when He expresses His desires for them. If it is a question of realisation, we must then think of man; yet of a strength also that is perfected in weakness.

This is the sum of the Lord's desires — sons, saints, under the Father's care; one, not by an effort or by agreement, but according to divine power. He being here, had kept them in the Father's name, faithful to accomplish all that the Father had committed to Him, and to lose none of those that were His. As to Judas, it was only the fulfillment of the word. The guardianship of Jesus present in the world could now no longer exist. But He spoke these things, being still here, the disciples hearing them, in order that they might understand that they were placed before the Father in the

same position that Christ had held, and that they might thus have fulfilled in themselves, in this same relationship, the joy which Christ had possessed. What unutterable grace! They had lost Him, visibly, to find themselves (by Him and in Him) in His own relationship with the Father, enjoying all that He enjoyed in that communion here below, as being in His place in their own relationship with the Father. Therefore He had imparted to them all the words that the Father had given Him — the communications of His love to Himself, when walking as Son in that place here below; and, in the especial name of “Holy Father,” by which the Son Himself addressed Him from the earth, the Father was to keep those whom the Son had left there. Thus should they have His joy fulfilled in themselves.

This was their relationship to the Father, Jesus being away. He turns now to their relationship with the world, in consequence of the former.

He gave them the word of His Father — not the words to bring them into communion with Him, but His word — the testimony of what He was. And the world had hated them as it had hated Jesus (the living and personal testimony of the Father) and the Father Himself. Being thus in relationship with the Father, who had taken them out from the men of the world, and having received the Father’s word (and eternal life in the Son in that knowledge), they were not of the world even as Jesus was not of the world: and therefor the world hated them. Nevertheless the Lord does not pray that they might be taken out of it; but that the Father should keep them from the evil. He enters into the detail of His desires in this respect, grounded on their not being of the world. He repeats this thought as the basis of their position here below. “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” What then were they to be? By what rule, by what model, were they to be formed? By the truth, and the Father’s word is truth. Christ was always the Word, but the living Word among men. In the scriptures we possess it, written and steadfast: they reveal Him, bear witness to Him. It was thus that the disciples were to be set apart. “Sanctify them by thy truth: thy word is the truth.” It was this, personally, that they were to be formed by, the Father’s word, as He was revealed in Jesus.

Their mission follows. Jesus sends them into the world, as the Father had sent Him into the world; into the world — in no wise of the world. They are sent into it on the part of Christ: were they of it, they could not be sent into it. But it was not only the Father's word which was the truth, nor the communication of the Father's word by Christ present with His disciples (points of which from verse 14 till now Jesus had been speaking, "I have given them thy word"): He sanctified Himself. He set Himself apart as a heavenly man above the heavens, a glorified man in the glory, in order that all truth might shine forth in Him, in His Person, raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father — all that the Father is being thus displayed in Him; the testimony of divine righteousness, of divine love, of divine power, totally overturning the lie of Satan, by which man had been deceived and falsity brought into the world; the perfect model of that which man was according to the counsels of God, and as the expression of His power morally and in glory — the image of the invisible God, the Son, and in glory. Jesus set Himself apart, in this place, in order that the disciples might be sanctified by the communication to them of what He was; for this communication was the truth, and created them in the image of that which it revealed. So that it was the Father's glory, revealed by Him on earth, and the glory into which He had ascended as man; for this is the complete result — the illustration in glory of the way in which He had set Himself apart for God, but on behalf of His own. Thus there is not only the forming and governing of the thoughts by the word, setting us apart morally to God, but the blessed affections flowing from our having this truth in the Person of Christ, our hearts connected with Him in grace. This ends the second part of that which related to the disciples, in communion and in testimony.

In verse 20, He declares that He prays also for those who should believe on Him through their means. Here the character of the unity differs a little from that in verse 11. There, in speaking of the disciples, He says, "as we are"; for the oneness of the Father and the Son showed itself in fixed purpose, object, love, work, everything. Therefore the disciples were to have that kind of unity. Here those who believed, inasmuch as receiving and taking part in that which was communicated, had their oneness in the power of the blessing into which they were brought. By one Spirit, in which they were necessarily united, they had a place in communion with

the Father and the Son. It was the communion of the Father and of the Son (compare 1 John 1:3; and how similar the language of the apostle is to that of Christ!). Thus, the Lord asks that they may be one in them — the Father and the Son. This was the means to make the world believe that the Father had sent the Son; for here were those that had believed it, who, however opposed their interests and habits might be, however strong their prejudices, yet were one (by this powerful revelation and by this work) in the Father and the Son.

Here His prayer ends, but not all His converse with His Father. He gives us (and here the witnesses and the believers are together) the glory which the Father has given Him. It is the basis of another, a third,\* mode of oneness. All partake, it is true, in glory, of this absolute oneness in thought, object, fixed purpose, which is found in the oneness of the Father and the Son. Perfection being come, that which the Holy Ghost had produced spiritually, His absorbing energy shutting out every other, was natural to all in glory.

[\* There are three unities spoken of. First of the disciples, “as we are,” unity by the power of one Spirit in thought, purpose, mind, service, the Holy Ghost making them all one, their path in common, the expression of His mind and power, and of nothing else. Then, of those who should believe through their means, unity in communion with the Father and the Son, “one in us” — still by the Holy Ghost but, as brought into that, as already said above, as in 1 John 1:3. Then unity in glory, “perfect in one,” in manifestation and descending revelation, the Father in the Son, and the Son in all of them. The second was for the world’s believing, the third for its knowing. The two first were literally accomplished according to the terms in which they are expressed. How far believers are departed from them since need not be said.]

But the principle of the existence of this unity, added yet another character to that truth — that of manifestation, or at least of an inward source which realised its manifestation in them: “I in them,” said Jesus, “and thou in me.” This is not the simple, perfect oneness of verse 11, nor the mutuality and communion of verse 21. It is Christ in all believers, and the Father in Christ, a unity in manifestation in glory, not merely in communion — a oneness in which all is perfectly connected with its source. And Christ, whom alone they were to manifest, is in them; and the Father, whom Christ had perfectly manifested, is in Him. The world (for this will be in the millennial glory, and manifested to the world) will then know (He does

not say, “that it may believe”) that Jesus had been sent by the Father (how deny it, when He should be seen in glory?) and, moreover, that the disciples had been loved by the Father, even as Jesus Himself was loved. The fact of their possessing the same glory as Christ would be the proof.

But there was yet more. There is that which the world will not see, because it will not be in it. “Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am.” There we are not only like Christ (conformed to the Son, bearing the image of the heavenly man before the eyes of the world), but with Him where He is. Jesus desires that we should see His glory.\* Solace and encouragement for us, after having partaken of His shame: but yet more precious, inasmuch as we see that He who has been dishonored as man, and because He became man for our sake, shall, even on that account, be glorified with a glory above all other glory, save His who has put all things under Him. For He speaks here of given glory. It is this which is so precious to us, because He has acquired it by His sufferings for us, and yet it is what was perfectly due to Him — the just reward for having, in them, perfectly glorified the Father. Now, this is a peculiar joy, entirely beyond the world. The world will see the glory that we have in common with Christ, and will know that we have been loved as Christ was loved. But there is a secret for those who love Him, which belongs to His Person and to our association with Himself. The Father loved Him before the world was — a love in which there is no question of comparison but of that which is infinite, perfect, and thus in itself satisfying. We shall share this in the sense of seeing our Beloved in it, and of being with Him, and of beholding the glory which the Father has given Him, according to the love wherewith He loved Him before the world had any part whatever in the dealings of God. Up to this we were in the world; here in heaven, out of all the world’s claims or apprehension (Christ seen in the fruit of that love which the Father had for Him before the world existed). Christ, then, was the Father’s delight. We see Him in the eternal fruit of that love as Man. We shall be in it with Him for ever, to enjoy His being in it — that our Jesus, our Beloved, is in it, and is what He is.

[\* This answers to Moses and Elias entering into the cloud, besides their display in the same glory as Christ, standing on the mountain.]

Meantime, being such, there was justice in the dealings of God with regard to His rejection. He had fully, perfectly, manifested the Father. The world

had not known Him, but Jesus had known Him, and the disciples had known that the Father had sent Him. He appeals here, not to the holiness of the Father, that He might keep them according to that blessed name, but to the righteousness of the Father, that He might make a distinction between the world on one side, and Jesus with His own on the other; for there was the moral reason as well as the ineffable love of the Father for the Son. And Jesus would have us enjoy, while here below, the consciousness that the distinction has been made by the communications of grace, before it is made by judgment.

He had declared unto them the Father's name, and would declare it, even when He had gone up on high, in order that the love wherewith the Father had loved Him might be in them (that their hearts might possess it in this world — what grace!) and Jesus Himself in them, the communicator of that love, the source of strength to enjoy it, conducting it, so to speak, in all the perfection in which He enjoyed it, into their hearts, in which He dwelt — Himself the strength, the life, the competency, the right, and the means of enjoying it thus, and as such, in the heart. For it is in the Son who declares it to us, that we know the name of the Father whom He reveals to us. That is, He would have us enjoy now that relationship in love in which we shall see Him in heaven. The world will know we have been loved as Jesus when we appear in the same glory with Him; but our part is to know it now, Christ being in us.

**CHAPTER 18.** The history of our Lord's last moments begins after the words that He addressed to His Father. We shall find even in this part of it, the general character of that which is related in this Gospel (according to all that we have seen in it), that the events bring out the personal glory of the Lord. We have, indeed, the malice of man strongly characterised; but the principal object in the picture is the Son of God, not the Son of man suffering under the weight of that which is come upon Him. We have not the agony in the garden. We have not the expression of His feeling Himself forsaken by God. The Jews too are put in the place of utter rejection.

The iniquity of Judas is as strongly marked here as in chapter 13. He well knew the place; for Jesus was in the habit of resorting thither with His disciples. What a thought — to choose such a place for His betrayal! What inconceivable hardness of heart! But alas! he had, as it were, given himself

up to Satan, the tool of the enemy, the manifestation of his power and of his true character.

How many things had taken place in that garden! What communications from a heart filled with God's own love, and seeking to make it penetrate into the narrow and too insensible hearts of His beloved disciples! But all was lost upon Judas. He comes, with the agents employed by the malice of the priests and Pharisees, to seize the Person of Jesus. But Jesus anticipates them. It is He who presents Himself to them. Knowing all things that should come upon Him, He goes forth, inquiring, "Whom seek ye?" It is the Savior, the Son of God, who offers Himself. They reply, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus says unto them, "I am he." Judas, also, was there, who knew Him well, and knew that voice, so long familiar to his ears. No one laid hands on Him: but as soon as His word echoes in their hearts, as soon as that divine "I am" is heard within them, they go backward, and fall to the ground. Who will take Him? He had but to go away and leave them there. But He came not for this; and the time to offer Himself up was come. He asks them again, therefore, "Whom seek ye?" They say, as before, "Jesus of Nazareth." The first time, the divine glory of the Person of Christ must needs display itself; and now His care for the redeemed ones. "If ye seek me," said the Lord, "let these go their way" — that the word might be fulfilled, "Of those whom thou hast given me, I have lost none." He presents Himself as the good Shepherd, giving His life for the sheep. He puts Himself before them, that they may escape the danger that threatens them, and that all may come upon Himself. He yields Himself up. All is His own free offering here.

Nevertheless, whatever might be the divine glory that He manifested, and the grace of a Savior who was faithful to His own, He acts in obedience, and in the perfect calmness of an obedience that had counted the whole cost with God, and that received it all from His Father's hand. When the carnal and unintelligent energy of Peter employs force to defend Him, who, if He would, had only needed to have gone away when a word from His lips had cast down to the ground all those who came to take Him, and the word that revealed to them the object of their search deprived them of all power to seize it. When Peter smites the servant Malchus, Jesus takes the place of obedience. "The cup that my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" The divine Person of Christ had been manifested; the voluntary

offering of Himself had been made, and that, in order to protect His own; and now His perfect obedience is at the same time displayed.

The malice of a hardened heart, and the want of intelligence of a carnal though sincere heart, have been brought to view. Jesus has His place alone and apart. He is the Savior. Submitting thus to man, in order to accomplish the counsels and the will of God, He allows them to take Him whither they would. Little of all that took place is related here. Jesus, although questioned, says scarcely anything of Himself. There is, before both the high priest and Pontius Pilate, the calm though meek superiority of One who was giving Himself: yet He is condemned only for the testimony He gave of Himself. Every one had already heard that which He taught. He challenges the authority which pursues the inquiry, not officially, but peacefully and morally; and when unjustly struck, He remonstrates with dignity and perfect calmness, while submitting to the insult. But He does not acknowledge the high priest in any way; while at the same time He does not at all oppose him. He leaves him in his moral incapacity.

The carnal weakness of Peter is manifested; as before his carnal energy.

When brought before Pilate (although because of truth, confessing that He was king), the Lord acts with the same calmness and the same submission; but He questions Pilate and instructs him in such a manner that Pilate can find no fault in Him. Morally incapable, however, of standing at the height of that which was before him, and embarrassed in presence of the divine prisoner, Pilate would have delivered Him by availing himself of a custom, then practiced by the government, of releasing a culprit to the Jews at the passover. But the uneasy indifference of a conscience which, hardened as it was, bowed before the presence of One who (even while thus humbled) could not but reach it, did not thus escape the active malice of those who were doing the enemy's work. The Jews exclaim against the proposal which the governor's disquietude suggested, and chose a robber instead of Jesus.

Pilate (chap. 19) gives way to his usual inhumanity. In the account, however, given in this Gospel, the Jews are prominent, as the real authors (as far as man was concerned) of the Lord's death. Jealous for their ceremonial purity, but indifferent to justice, they are not content to judge Him according to their own law;\* they choose to have Him put to death



by the Romans, for the whole counsel of God must needs be accomplished.

[\* It is said that their Jewish traditions forbade their putting any one to death during the great feasts. It is possible that this may have influenced the Jews; but however that might be, the purposes of God were thus accomplished. At other times the Jews were not so prompt in submitting to the Roman exigencies that deprived them of the right of life and death.]

It is on the repeated demands of the Jews that Pilate delivers Jesus into their hands — thoroughly guilty in so doing, for he had openly avowed His innocence, and had had his conscience decidedly touched and alarmed by the evident proofs there were that he had some extraordinary person before him. He will not show that he is touched, but he is so (chap. 19:8). The divine glory that pierced through the humiliation of Christ acts upon him, and gives force to the declaration of the Jews that Jesus had made Himself the Son of God. Pilate had scourged Him and given Him up to the insults of the soldiers; and here he would have stopped. Perhaps he hoped also that the Jews would be satisfied with this, and he presents Jesus to them crowned with thorns. Perhaps he hoped that their jealousy with regard to these national insults would induce them to ask for His deliverance. But, ruthlessly pursuing their malicious purpose, they cry out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate objects to this for himself, while giving them liberty to do it, saying that he finds no fault in Him. Upon this they plead their Jewish law. They had a law of their own, say they, and by this law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God. Pilate, already struck and exercised in mind, is the more alarmed; and, going back to the judgment hall again, questions Jesus. He makes no reply. The pride of Pilate awakes, and he asks if Jesus does not know that he has power to condemn or to release Him. The Lord maintains, in replying, the full dignity of His Person. Pilate had no power over Him, were it not the will of God — to this He submitted. It heightened the sin of those who had delivered Him up, to suppose that man could do anything against Him, were it not that the will of God was thus to be accomplished. The knowledge of His Person formed the measure of the sin committed against Him. The not perceiving it caused everything to be falsely judged, and, in the case of Judas, showed the most absolute moral blindness. He knew His Master’s power. What was the meaning of delivering Him up to man, if it

were not that His hour was come? But, this being the case, what was the betrayer's position?

But Jesus always speaks according to the glory of His Person, and as being thereby entirely above the circumstances through which He was passing in grace, and in obedience to His Father's will. Pilate is thoroughly disturbed by the Lord's reply, yet his feeling is not strong enough to counteract the motive with which the Jews press him, but it has sufficient power to make him throw back upon the Jews all that there was of will in His condemnation, and to make them fully guilty of the Lord's rejection.

Pilate sought to withdraw Him from their fury. At last, fearing to be accused of infidelity to Caesar, he turns with contempt to the Jews, saying, "Behold your King"; acting — although unconsciously — under the hand of God, to bring out that memorable word from their lips, their condemnation, and their calamity even to this day, "We have no king but Caesar." They denied their Messiah. The fatal word, which called down the judgment of God, was now pronounced; and Pilate delivers up Jesus to them.

Jesus, humbled and bearing His cross, takes His place with the transgressors. Nevertheless He who would that all should be fulfilled ordained that a testimony should be rendered to His dignity; and Pilate (perhaps to vex the Jews, certainly to accomplish the purposes of God) affixes to the cross as the Lord's title, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews": the twofold truth — the despised Nazarene is the true Messiah. Here, then, as throughout this Gospel, the Jews take their place as cast off by God.

At the same time the apostle shows — here, as elsewhere — that Jesus was the true Messiah, by quoting the prophecies which speak of that which happened to Him in general, with regard to His rejection and His sufferings, so that He is proved to be the Messiah by the very circumstances in which He was rejected of the people.

After the history of His crucifixion, as the act of man, we have that which characterises it in respect to what Jesus was upon the cross. The blood and water flow from His pierced side.

The devotedness of the women who followed Him, less important perhaps on the side of action, shines out in its own way nevertheless in that perseverance of love which brought them nigh to the cross. The more responsible position of the apostles as men scarcely allowed it to them, circumstanced as they were; but this takes nothing from the privilege which grace attaches to woman when faithful to Jesus. But it was the occasion for Christ to give us fresh instruction, by showing Himself such as He was, and by setting His work before us, above all mere circumstances, as the effect and the expression of a spiritual energy which consecrated Him, as man, entirely to God, offering Himself also to God by the eternal Spirit. His work was done. He had offered Himself up. He returns, so to speak, into His personal relationships. Nature, in His human feelings, is seen in its perfection; and, at the same time, His divine superiority, personally, to the circumstances through which He passed in grace as the obedient man. The expression of His filial feelings shows, that the consecration to God, which removed Him from all those affections that are alike the necessity and the duty of the man according to nature, was not the want of human feeling, but the power of the Spirit of God. Seeing the women, He speaks to them no longer as Teacher and Savior, the resurrection and the life; it is Jesus, a man, individually, in His human relationship.

“Woman,” He says, “behold thy son!” — committing His mother to the care of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved — and to the disciple, “Behold thy mother!” and thenceforth that disciple took her to his own home. Sweet and precious commission! A confidence which spoke that which he who was thus loved could alone appreciate, as being its immediate object. This shows us also that His love for John had a character of human affection and attachment, according to God, but not essentially divine, although full of divine grace — a grace which gave it all its value, but which clothed itself with the reality of the human heart. It was this, evidently, which bound Peter and John together. Jesus was their only and common object. Of very different characters — and so much the more united on that account — they thought but of one thing. Absolute consecration to Jesus is the strongest bond between human hearts. It strips them of self, and they have but one soul in thought, intent, and settled purpose, because they have only one object. But in Jesus this was perfect,

and it was grace. It is not said, “the disciple who loved Jesus”; that would have been quite out of season. It would have been to take Jesus entirely out of His place, and His dignity, His personal glory, and to destroy the value of His love to John. Nevertheless John loved Christ, and consequently appreciated thus his Master’s love; and, his heart attached to Him by grace, he devoted himself to the execution of this sweet commission, which he takes pleasure in relating here. It is indeed love that tells it, although it does not speak of itself.

I believe that we again see this feeling (used by the Spirit of God, not evidently as the foundation, but to give its color to the expression of that which he had seen and known) in the beginning of John’s first epistle.

We also see here that this Gospel does not show us Christ under the weight of His sufferings, but acting in accordance with the glory of His Person as above all things, and fulfilling all things in grace. In perfect calmness He provides for His mother; having done this, He knows that all is finished. He has, according to human language, entire self-possession.

There is yet one prophecy to be fulfilled. He says, “I thirst,” and, as God had foretold, they give Him vinegar. He knows that now there is not one detail left of all that was to be accomplished. He bows His head, and Himself gives\* up His spirit.

[\* This is the force of the expression; which is quite different from the word translated expired. We learn from Luke 23:46 that He did this when He had said, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” But in John, the Holy Ghost is setting forth even His death as the result of a voluntary act, giving up His spirit, and not saying to whom He committed (as man with absolute and perfect faith) His human spirit, His soul, in dying. It is His divine competency that is here shown, and not His trust in His Father. The word is never used in this way but in this passage as to Christ, in either the New Testament or the LXX.]

Thus, when the whole divine work is accomplished the divine man giving up His spirit, that spirit leaves the body which had been its organ and its vessel. The time was come for so doing; and by doing it, He secured the accomplishment of another divine word — “Not one of his bones shall be broken.” But everything bore its part in the fulfillment of those words, and the purposes of Him who had pronounced them beforehand.

A soldier pierces His side with a spear. It is from a dead Savior that flow forth the tokens of an eternal and perfect salvation — the water and the blood; the one to cleanse the sinner, the other to expiate his sins. The evangelist saw it. His love for the Lord makes him like to remember that he saw Him thus unto the end; he tells it in order that we may believe. But if we see in the beloved disciples the vessel that the Holy Ghost uses (and very sweet it is to see it, and according to the will of God), we see plainly who it is that uses it. How many things John witnessed which he did not relate! The cry of grief and of abandonment — the earthquake — the centurion's confession — the history of the thief: all these things took place before his eyes, which were fixed upon his Master; yet he does not mention them. He speaks of that which his Beloved was in the midst of all this. The Holy Ghost causes him to relate that which belonged to the personal glory of Jesus. His affections made him find it a sweet and easy task. The Holy Ghost attached him to it, employing him in that which he was well suited to perform. Through grace the instrument lent itself readily to the work for which the Holy Ghost set it apart. His memory and his heart were under the dominant and exclusive influence of the Spirit of God. That Spirit employed them in His work. One sympathises with the instrument; one believes in that which the Holy Ghost relates by his means, for the words are those of the Holy Ghost.

Nothing can be more touching, more deeply interesting, than divine grace thus expressing itself in human tenderness and taking its form. While possessing the entire reality of human affection, it had all the power and depth of divine grace. It was divine grace that Jesus should have such affections. On the other hand, nothing could be farther from the appreciation of this sovereign source of divine love, flowing through the perfect channel which it made for itself by its own power, than the pretension to express our love as reciprocal; it would be, on the contrary, to fail entirely in that appreciation. True saints among the Moravians have called Jesus "brother," and others have borrowed their hymns or the expression; the word never says so. "He is not ashamed to call us brethren," but it is quite another thing for us to call Him so. The personal dignity of Christ is never lost in the intensity and tenderness of His love.

But the rejected Savior was to be with the rich and the honorable in His death, however despised He may previously have been; and two, who

dared not confess Him while He lived, awakened now by the greatness of the sin of their nation, and by the event itself of His death — which the grace of God, who had reserved them for this work, made them feel — occupy themselves with the attentions due to His dead body. Joseph, himself a counsellor, comes to ask Pilate for the body of Jesus, Nicodemus joining with him to render the last honors to Him whom they had never followed during His life. We can understand this. To follow Jesus constantly under reproach, and compromise oneself for ever on His account, is a very different thing from acting when some great occasion happens in which there is no longer room for the former, and when the extent of the evil compels us to separate from it; and when the good, rejected because it is perfect in testimony, and perfected in its rejection, forced us to take a part, if through grace any moral sense exists in us. God thus fulfilled His words of truth. Joseph and Nicodemus place the Lord's body in a new sepulchre in a garden near the cross; for, on account of it being the Jews' preparation, they could do no more at that moment.

In **CHAPTER 20** we have, in a summary of several of the leading facts among those which took place after the resurrection of Jesus, a picture of all the consequences of that great event, in immediate connection with the grace that produced them, and with the affections that ought to be seen in the faithful when again brought into relationship with the Lord; and at the same time, a picture of all God's ways up to the revelation of Christ to the remnant before the millennium. In chapter 21 the millennium is pictured to us.

Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons, appears first in the scene — a touching expression of the ways of God. She represents, I doubt not, the Jewish remnant of that day, personally attached to the Lord, but not knowing the power of resurrection. She is alone in her love: the very strength of her affection isolates her. She was not the only one saved, but she comes alone to seek — wrongly to seek, if you will, but to seek — Jesus, before the testimony of His glory shines forth in a world of darkness, because she loved Himself. She comes before the other women, while it was yet dark. It is a loving heart (we have already seen it in the believing women) occupied with Jesus, when the public testimony of man is still entirely wanting. And it is to this that Jesus first manifests Himself when He is risen. Nevertheless her heart knew where it would find a

response. She goes away to Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, when she does not find the body of Christ. Peter and the other disciple go, and find the proofs of a resurrection accomplished (as to Jesus Himself) with all the composure that became the power of God, great as the alarm might be that it created in the mind of man. There had been no haste; everything was in order: and Jesus was not there.

The two disciples, however, are not moved by the same attachment as that which filled her heart, who had been the object of so mighty a deliverance\* on the Lord's part. They see, and, on these visible proofs, they believe. It was not a spiritual understanding of the thoughts of God by means of His word; they saw and believed. There is nothing in this which gathers the disciples together. Jesus was away; He had risen. They had satisfied themselves on this point, and they go away to their home. But Mary, led by affection rather than by intelligence, is not satisfied with coldly recognising that Jesus was again risen.\*\* She thought Him still dead, because she did not possess Him. His death, the fact of her not finding Him again, added to the intensity of her affection, because He Himself was its object. All the tokens of this affection are produced here in the most touching manner. She supposes that the gardener must know who was in question without her telling him, for she only thought of one (as if I inquired of a beloved object in a family, "How is he?"). Bending over the sepulchre, she turns her head when He approaches; but then the Good Shepherd, risen from the dead, calls His sheep by her name; and the known and loved voice — mighty according to the grace which thus called her — instantly reveals Him to her who heard it. She turns to Him, and replies, "Rabbonimy Master."

[\* "Seven demons." This represents the complete possession of this poor woman by the unclean spirits to whom she was a prey. It is the expression of the real state of the Jewish people.]

[\*\* It is impossible to me, in giving great principles for the help of those who seek to understand the word, to develop all that is so deeply touching and interesting in this twentieth chapter, on which I have often pondered with (through grace) an ever-growing interest. This revelation of the Lord to the poor woman who could not do without her Savior, has a touching beauty, which every detail enhances. But there is one point of view to which I cannot but call the reader's attention. There are four conditions of soul presented here which, taken together, are very instructive, and each in the case of a believer: 1st. John and Peter, who see and believe, are really believers; but they do not see in Christ the only center of all the thoughts

of God, for His glory, for the world, for souls. Neither is He so for their affections, although they are believers. Having found that He was risen, they do without Him. Mary, who did not know this, who was even culpably ignorant, could nevertheless not do without Jesus. She must possess Himself. Peter and John go to their home; this is the center of their interests. They believe indeed, but self and home suffice them. 2nd. Thomas believes, and acknowledges with true orthodox faith, on incontestable proofs, that Jesus is his Lord and his God. He truly believes for himself. He has not the communications of the efficacy of the Lord's work, and of the relationship with His Father into which Jesus brings His own, the assembly. He has peace perhaps, but he has missed all the revelation of the assembly's position. How many souls-saved souls even — are there in these two conditions! — 3rd. Mary Magdalene is ignorant in the extreme. She does not know that Christ is risen. She has so little right sense of His being Lord and God, that she thinks some one might have taken away His body. But Christ is her all, the need of her soul, the only desire of her heart. Without Him she has no home, no Lord, no anything. Now to this need Jesus answers; it indicates the work of the Holy Ghost. He calls His sheep by her name, shows Himself to her first of all, teaches her that His presence was not now to be a Jewish bodily return to earth, that He must ascend to His Father, that the disciples were now His brethren, and that they were placed in the same position as Himself with His God and His Father — as Himself, the risen Man, ascended to His God and Father. All the glory of the new individual position is opened to her. — 4th. This gathers the disciples together. Jesus then brings them the peace which He has made, and they have the full joy of a present Savior who brings it them. He makes this peace (possessed by them in virtue of His work and His victory) their starting-point, sends them as the Father had sent Him, and imparts to them the Holy Ghost as the breath and power of life, that they may be able to bear that peace to others. — These are the communications of the efficacy of His work, as He had given to Mary that of the relationship to the Father which resulted from it. The whole is the answer to Mary's attachment to Christ, or what resulted from it. If through grace there is affection, the answer will assuredly be granted. It is the truth which flows from the work of Christ. No other state than that which Christ here presents is in accordance with what He has done, and with the Father's love. He cannot, by His work, place us in any other.]

But while thus revealing Himself to the beloved remnant, whom He had delivered, all is changed in their position and in His relationship with them. He was not going now to dwell bodily in the midst of His people on earth. He did not come back to re-establish the kingdom in Israel. "Touch me not," says He to Mary. But by redemption He had wrought a far more important thing. He had placed them in the same position as Himself with His Father and His God; and He calls them — which He never had, and never could have done before — His brethren. Until His death the corn of wheat remained alone. Pure and perfect, the Son of God, He could not



stand in the same relationship to God as the sinner; but, in the glorious position which He was going to resume as man, He could, through redemption, associate with Himself His redeemed ones, cleansed, regenerated, and adopted in Him.

He sends them word of the new position they were to have in common with Himself. He says to Mary, "Touch me not; but go to my brethren, and tell them that I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." The will of the Father — accomplished by means of the glorious work of the Son, who, as man, has taken His place, apart from sin, with His God and Father — and the work of the Son, the source of eternal life to them, have brought the disciples into the same position as Himself before the Father.

The testimony born to this truth gathers the disciples together. They meet with closed doors, unprotected now by the care and power of Jesus, the Messiah, Jehovah on earth. But if they had no longer the shelter of the Messiah's presence, they have Jesus in their midst, bringing them that which they could not have before His death — "Peace."

But He did not bring them this blessing merely as their own portion. Having given them proofs of His resurrection, and that in His body He was the same Jesus, He sets them in this perfect peace as the starting point of their mission. The Father, eternal and infinite fountain of love, had sent the Son, who abode in it, who was the witness of that love, and of the peace which He, the Father, shed around Himself, where sin had no existence. Rejected in His mission, Jesus had — on behalf of a world where sin existed — made peace for all who should receive the testimony of the grace which had made it; and He now sends His disciples from the bosom of that peace into which He had brought them, by the remission of sins through His death, to bear testimony to it in the world.

He says again, "Peace be unto you," to send them forth into the world clothed and filled with that peace, their feet shod with it, even as the Father had sent Him. He gives them the Holy Ghost for this end, that according to His power they might bear the remission of sins to a world that was bowed down under the yoke of sin.

I do not doubt that, speaking historically, the Spirit here is distinguished from Acts 2, inasmuch as here it is a breath of inward life, as God breathed into the nostrils of Adam a breath of life. It is not the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Thus Christ, who is a quickening Spirit, imparts spiritual life to them according to the power of resurrection.\* As to the general picture figuratively presented in the passage, it is the Spirit bestowed on the saints gathered by the testimony of His being risen and His going to the Father, as the whole scene represents the assembly in its present privileges. Thus we have the remnant attached to Christ by love; believers individually recognised as children of God, and in the same position before Him as Christ; and then the assembly founded on this testimony, gathered together with Jesus in the midst, in the enjoyment of peace; and its members, individually constituted, in connection with the peace which Christ has made, a witness to the world of the remission of sins — its administration being committed to them.

[\* Compare Romans 4-8 and Colossians 2 and 3. Resurrection was the power of life which brought them out of the dominion of sin, that had its end in death, and that was condemned in the death of Jesus, and they dead to it, but not condemned by it, sin having been condemned in His death. This is a question, not of guilt, but of state. Our guilt, blessed be God, was put away too. But here we die with Christ, and resurrection presents us (Romans, as quoted, unfolds the side of death; Colossians adds resurrection. Romans is death to sin, Colossians to the world) living before God in a life in which Jesus — and we by Him — appeared in His presence according to the perfection of divine righteousness. But this supposed His work also.]

Thomas represents the Jews in the last days, who will believe when they see. Blessed are they who have believed without seeing. But the faith of Thomas is not concerned with the position of sonship. He acknowledges, as the remnant will do, that Jesus is his Lord and his God. He was not with them in their first church gathering.

The Lord here, by His actions, consecrates the first day of the week for His meeting together with His own, in spirit here below.

The evangelist is far from exhausting all that there was to relate of that which Jesus did. The object of that which he has related is linked with the communication of eternal life in Christ; first, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and, second, that in believing we have life through His name. To this the Gospel is consecrated.

The next chapter, while rendering a fresh testimony to the resurrection of Jesus, gives us — to verse 13a picture of the millennial work of Christ; from thence to the end, the especial portions of Peter and John in connection with their service to Christ. The application is limited to the earth, for they had known Jesus on earth. It is Paul who will give us the heavenly position of Christ and the assembly. But he has no place here.

**CHAPTER 21.** Led by Peter, several of the apostles go a fishing. The Lord meets them in the same circumstances as those in which He found them at the beginning, and reveals Himself to them in the same manner. John at once understands that it is the Lord. Peter, with his usual energy, casts himself into the sea to reach Him.

Observe here, that we find ourselves again upon the ground of the historic Gospels — that is to say, that the miracle of the draught of fishes identifies itself with the work of Christ on earth, and is in the sphere of His former association with His disciples. It is Galilee, not Bethany. It has not the usual character of the doctrine of this Gospel, which presents the divine Person of Jesus, outside all dispensation, here below; raising our thoughts above all such subjects. Here (at the end of the Gospel and of the sketch given in chapter 20 of the result of the manifestation of His divine Person and of His work) the evangelist comes for the first time on the ground of the synoptics, of the manifestation and coming fruits of Christ's connection with earth. Thus the application of the passage to this point is not merely an idea which the narrative suggests to the mind, but it rests upon the general teaching of the word.

Still there is a notable difference between that which took place at the beginning and here. In the former scene the ships began to sink, the nets broke. Not so here, and the Holy Ghost marks this circumstance as distinctive: Christ's millennial work is not marred. He is there after His resurrection, and that which He performs does not rest, in itself, on man's responsibility as to its effect here below: the net does not break. Also, when the disciples bring the fish which they had caught, the Lord has some already there. So shall it be on earth at the end. Before His manifestation He will have prepared a remnant for Himself on the earth; but after His manifestation He will gather a multitude also from the sea of nations.

Another idea presents itself. Christ is again as in companionship with His disciples. "Come," says He, "and dine." There is no question here of heavenly things, but of the renewing of His connection with His people in the kingdom. All this does not immediately belong to the subject of this Gospel, which leads us higher. Accordingly it is introduced in a mysterious and symbolical manner. This appearance of Christ's is spoken of as His third manifestation. I doubt His manifestation on earth before His death being included in the number. I would rather apply it to that which, first, after His resurrection, gave rise to the gathering together of the saints as an assembly; secondly, to a revelation of Himself to the Jews after the manner of that which is presented in the Song of Songs; and lastly here to the public display of His power, when He shall already have gathered the remnant together. His appearing like the lightning is outside all these things. Historically the three appearances were — the day of His resurrection; the following first day of the week; and His appearance at the sea of Galilee.

Afterwards, in a passage full of ineffable grace, He entrusts Peter with the care of His sheep (that is, I doubt not, of His Jewish sheep; he is the apostle of the circumcision), and leaves to John an indefinite period of sojourn upon earth. His words apply much more to their ministry than to their persons, with the exception of one verse referring to Peter. But this demands a little more development.

The Lord begins with the full restoration of Peter's soul. He does not reproach him with his fault, but judges the source of evil that produced itself-confidence. Peter had declared, that if all should deny Jesus, yet he at least would not deny Him. The Lord therefore asks him, "Lovest thou me more than do these?" and Peter is reduced to acknowledge that it required the omniscience of God to know that he, who had boasted of having more love than all others for Jesus, had really any affection for Him at all. And the question thrice repeated must indeed have searched the depths of his heart. Nor was it till the third time that he says, "Thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Jesus did not let his conscience go until he had come to this. Nevertheless the grace which did this for Peter's good — the grace which had followed him in spite of everything, praying for him before he felt his need or had committed the fault — is perfect here also. For, at the moment when it might be thought that at the utmost he would

be re-admitted through divine forbearance, the strongest testimony of grace is lavished upon him. When humbled by his fall, and brought to entire dependence upon grace, all-abounding grace displays itself. The Lord commits that which He most loved to him — the sheep whom He had just redeemed. He commits them to Peter's care. This is the grace which surmounts all that man is, which is above all that man is; which consequently produces confidence, not in self, but in God, as One whose grace can always be trusted in, as being full of grace and perfect in that grace which is above everything, and is always itself; grace which makes us able to accomplish the work of grace towards — whom? — man who needs it. It creates confidence in proportion to the measure in which it acts.

I think that the Lord's words apply to the sheep already known to Peter; and with whom only Jesus had been in daily connection; who would naturally be before His mind, and that in the scene which we see this chapter puts before us — the sheep of the house of Israel.

It appears to me that there is progression in that which the Lord says to Peter. He asks, "Lovest thou me more than do these?" Peter says, "Thou knowest that I have affection for thee." Jesus replies, "Feed my lambs." The second time He says only, "Lovest thou me?" omitting the comparison between Peter and the rest, and his former pretension. Peter repeats the declaration of his affection. Jesus says to him, "Shepherd my sheep." The third time He says, "Hast thou affection for me?" using Peter's own expression; and on Peter's replying, as we have seen, seizing this use of his words by the Lord, He says, "Feed my sheep." The links between Peter and Christ known on earth made him fit to pasture the flock of the Jewish remnant — to feed the lambs, by showing them the Messiah as He had been, and to act as a shepherd, in guiding those that were more advanced, and in supplying them with food.

But the grace of the loving Savior did not stop here. Peter might still feel the sorrow of having missed such an opportunity of confessing the Lord at the critical moment. Jesus assures him that if he had failed in doing so of his own will, he should be allowed to do it by the will of God; and as when young he girded himself, others should gird him when old and carry him whither he would not. It should be given him by the will of God to die for

the Lord, as he had formerly declared himself ready to do in his own strength. Now also that Peter was humbled and brought entirely under grace — that he knew he had no strength — that he felt his dependence on the Lord, his utter inefficiency if he trusted to his own power — now, I repeat, the Lord calls Peter to follow Him; which he had pretended to do, when the Lord had told him he could not. It was this that his heart desired. Feeding those whom Jesus had continued to feed until His death, he should see Israel reject everything, even as Christ had seen them do; and his own work end, even as Christ had seen His work end (the judgment ready to fall, and beginning at the house of God). Finally, what he had pretended to do and could not, he would now do — follow Christ to prison and to death.

Then comes the history of the disciple whom Jesus loved. John having, no doubt, heard the call addressed to Peter, follows also himself; and Peter, linked with him, as we have seen, by their common love to the Lord, inquires what should happen to him likewise. The Lord's answer announces the portion and ministry of John, but, as it appears to me, in connection with the earth. But the Lord's enigmatical expression is, nevertheless, as remarkable as it is important: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" They thought, in consequence, that John would not die. The Lord did not say so — a warning not to ascribe a meaning to His words, instead of receiving one; and at the same time showing our need of the Holy Spirit's help; for the words literally might be so taken. Giving heed myself, I trust, to this warning, I will say what I think to be the meaning of the Lord's words, which I do not doubt to be so — a meaning which gives a key to many other expressions of the same kind.

In the narrative of the Gospel, we are in connection with the earth (that is, the connection of Jesus with the earth). As planted on earth at Jerusalem, the assembly, as the house of God, is formally recognised as taking the place of the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem. The history of the assembly, as thus formally established as a center on earth, ended with the destruction of Jerusalem. The remnant saved by the Messiah was no longer to be in connection with Jerusalem, the center of the gathering of the Gentiles. In this sense the destruction of Jerusalem put an end judicially to the new system of God upon earth — a system promulgated by Peter

(Acts 3); with regard to which Stephen declared to the Jews their resistance to the Holy Ghost, and was sent, as it were, as a messenger after Him who was gone to receive the kingdom and to return; while Paul — elected from among those enemies of the good news still addressed to the Jews by the Holy Ghost after the death of Christ, and separated from Jews and Gentiles, in order to be sent to the latter — performs a new work that was hidden from the prophets of old, namely, the gathering out of a heavenly assembly without distinction of Jew or Gentile.

The destruction of Jerusalem put an end to one of these systems, and to the existence of Judaism according to the law and the promises, leaving only the heavenly assembly. John remained — the last of the twelve — until this period, and after Paul, in order to watch over the assembly as established on that footing, that is, as the organised and earthly frame-work (responsible in that character) of the testimony of God, and the subject of His government on the earth. But this is not all. In his ministry John went on to the end, to the coming of Christ in judgment to the earth; and he has linked the judgment of the assembly, as the responsible witness on earth, with the judgment of the world, when God shall resume His connection with the earth in government (the testimony of the assembly being finished, and it having been caught up, according to its proper character, to be with the Lord in heaven).

Thus the Apocalypse presents the judgment of the assembly on earth, as the formal witness for the truth; and then passes on to God's resumption of the government of the earth, in view of the establishment of the Lamb upon the throne, and the setting aside of the power of evil. The heavenly character of the assembly is only found there, when its members are exhibited on thrones as kings and priests, and when the marriage of the Lamb takes place in heaven. The earth — after the Seven Churches — has no longer the heavenly testimony. It is not the subject, either in the seven assemblies, or in the properly so-called prophetic part. Thus, taking the assemblies as such in those days, the assembly according to Paul is not seen there. Taking the assemblies as descriptions of the assembly, the subject of God's government on earth, we have it until its final rejection; and the history is continuous, and the prophetic part immediately connected with the end of the assembly: only, in place of it, we have the world and then the Jews.\*

[\* Thus we have in the ministerial life, and in the teaching, of Peter and John, the whole religious earthly history from the beginning to the end; commencing with the Jews in continuation of the relations of Christ with them, traversing the whole christian epoch, and finding itself again, after the close of the earthly history of the assembly, on the ground of God's relationship to the world (comprising the Jewish remnant) in view of the introduction of the First-born into the world (the last glorious event terminating the history which began with His rejection). Paul is on very different ground. He sees the assembly, as the body of Christ, united to Him in heaven.]

The coming of Christ therefore, which is spoken of at the end of the Gospel, is His manifestation on earth; and John, who lived in person until the close of all that was introduced by the Lord in connection with Jerusalem, continues here, in his ministry, until the manifestation of Christ to the world.

In John, then, we have two things. On the one hand, his ministry, as far as connected with dispensation and with the ways of God, does not go beyond that which is earthly: the coming of Christ, is His manifestation to complete those ways, and to establish the government of God. On the other hand, he links us with the Person of Jesus, who is above and outside all dispensations, and all the dealings of God, save as being the manifestation of God Himself. John does not enter upon the ground of the assembly as Paul sets it forth. It is either Jesus personally, or the relations of God with the earth.\* His epistle presents the reproduction of the life of Christ in ourselves, guarding us thus from all pretensions of perverse teachers. But by these two parts of the truth, we have a precious sustainment of faith given to us, when all that belongs to the body of testimony may fail: Jesus, personally the object of faith in whom we know God; the life itself of God, reproduced in us, as being quickened by Christ. This is for ever true, and this is eternal life, if we were alone without the assembly on earth: and it leads us over its ruins, in possession of that which is essential, and of that which will abide for ever. The government of God will decide all the rest: only it is our privilege and duty to maintain Paul's part of the testimony of God, as long as through grace we can.

[\* John presents the Father manifested in the Son, God declared by the Son in the bosom of the Father, and that withal as eternal life — God to us, and life. Paul is employed to reveal our presentation to God in Him. Though each alludes in passing to the other point, one is characterised by the presentation of God to us, and eternal life given, the other, by our presentation to God.]



Remark also that the work of Peter and Paul is that of gathering together, whether it be in circumcision or the Gentiles. John is conservative, maintaining that which is essential in eternal life. He relates the judgment of God in connection with the world, but as a subject that is outside his own relations with God, which are given as an introduction and exordium to the Apocalypse. He follows Christ when Peter is called, because, although Peter was occupied, as Christ had been, with the call of the Jews, John — without being called to that work — followed Him on the same ground. The Lord explains it, as we have seen.

Verses 24, 25 are a kind of inscription on the book. John has not related all that Jesus did, but that which revealed Him as everlasting life. As to His works, they could not be numbered.

Here, thanks be to God, are these four precious books laid open, as far as God has enabled me to do so, in their great principles. Meditation on their contents in detail, I must leave to each individual heart, assisted by the mighty operation of the Holy Ghost; for if studied in detail, one might almost say with the apostle that the world would not contain the books that should be written. May God in His grace lead souls into the enjoyment of the inexhaustible streams of grace and truth in Jesus which they contain!

## THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The Acts of the Apostles are divided essentially into three parts — chapters 1, 2 to 12; and 13 to the end. Chapters 11, 12 may be termed transitional chapters founded on the event related in chapter 10. Chapter 1 gives us that which is connected with the Lord's resurrection; chapters 2-12 that work of the Holy Ghost of which Jerusalem and the Jews were the center, but which branches out into the free action of the Spirit of God, independent of, but not separated from, the twelve and Jerusalem as the center; chapter 13, and the succeeding chapters, the work of Paul, flowing from a more distinct mission from Antioch; chapter 15 connecting the two in order to preserve unity in the whole course. We have indeed the admission of Gentiles in the second part, but it is in connection with the work going on among the Jews. These latter had rejected the witness of the Holy Ghost to a glorified Christ, as they had rejected the Son of God in His humiliation; and God prepared a work outside them, in which the apostle of the Gentiles laid foundations that annulled the distinction between Jew and Gentile, and which unite them — as in themselves equally dead in trespasses and sins — to Christ, the Head of His body, the assembly, in heaven.\*

[\* It is a sorrowful but instructive thing to see, in the last division of the book, how the spiritual energy of a Paul closes, as to its effect in work, in the shadow of a prison. Yet we see the wisdom of God in it. The boasted apostolicism of Rome never had an apostle but as a prisoner; and Christianity, as the Epistle to the Romans testifies, was already planted there.]

Let us now examine the chapters in their course. Chapter 1 supplies us with the narrative of that which relates to Jesus risen, and the actions of the apostles before the descent of the Holy Ghost. The Lord's communications present several very interesting points. Jesus, the risen man, acts and speaks by the Holy Ghost after His resurrection as before it. Precious token of our own position, as reminding us that we shall have the Holy Ghost after our resurrection, and that, being no longer engaged in restraining and mortifying the flesh, His divine energy in us will be entirely consecrated to eternal joy and worship, and to the service committed to us

by God. The risen Lord then gives His disciples commandments in connection with the new position He assumes. Their life and their service are to be formed and guided in view of His resurrection — a truth of which they had irrefragable proofs. They were still on earth, but they were pilgrims there, having Him in view who had gone before them raised from among the dead. Their relations with Him are still connected with their position on earth. He speaks to them of the kingdom, and of that which concerned the kingdom. Jerusalem was the starting-point of their ministry, even more than of His own. For He had gathered together the poor of the flock wherever He had found them, especially in Galilee;\* but now, resurrection having made Him in power the vessel of the sure mercies of David, He calls Israel afresh to own as Prince and Savior the One whom they had rejected as the living Messiah on earth. The Epistles of Peter are connected with the gospel in this point of view.

[\* The mission given in Luke 24 is the one fulfilled both in Peter's and Paul's discourses in the Acts, but especially in chapters 2 and 13, not that of Matthew 28 which, indeed, was only to Gentiles. Luke's was on His ascension from Bethany, Matthew's in resurrection from Galilee, where He had sought the poor of the flock (compare Matthew 4:15).]

2 Nevertheless, to exercise this ministry, they were to wait for the accomplishment of the Father's promise, the Holy Ghost, with whom they were to be baptised, according to John's testimony, which the Lord assured them should soon take place. The mission of the Holy Ghost led them, at the same time, out of the Jewish field of purely temporal promises. The Father's promise of the Holy Ghost was a very different thing from that of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel by the power of Jehovah, the God of judgment. It was not for them to know the time and season of this restoration, the knowledge of which the Father kept in His own possession; but they should themselves receive the power of the Holy Ghost, who would come down upon them; and they should be witnesses unto Jesus (as they had known Him, and according to the manifestation of Himself after His resurrection), both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth — thus making Jerusalem the starting-point and first object, according to the mission, Luke 24:47. Nevertheless, their testimony was founded on their beholding their Master and their Lord caught up from their midst, and received into the clouds of heaven, which hid Him from their sight. While

looking steadfastly upwards, as this took place, two messengers from heaven come and announce to them that He will return in like manner. His manifestation in this lower world, beneath the heavens, is therefore here intended. He will return to earth to be seen of the world. We have not the rapture of the assembly, nor the assembly's association with Him while absent. With the knowledge of Jesus taken up out of the world, and to come again into the world, as the termini and elements of all their teaching, they return to Jerusalem, there to wait for the Holy Ghost who was promised unto them. It is not into Galilee that they go. They are to be witnesses in Jerusalem of the heavenly rights of that Christ who had been rejected on earth by Jerusalem and the Jews.\*

[\* In this sense it is not a continuation of Christ's mission on the earth, continued in the Matthew mission from Galilee.]

3 All this clearly shows the position in which they were placed, and the mission committed to them. But before they receive the Holy Ghost for its fulfillment, some other characteristic circumstances find their place in this chapter. They act, under the guidance of Peter, according to intelligence in the word, before they are endowed with power from on high. These two things are therefore distinct from each other.

It appears that, although Peter was not directly led of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit put His seal on that which was done in accordance with the word in the Old Testament understood by the apostle. We have before seen that Christ, after His resurrection, opened the understanding of His disciples that they might understand the scriptures. They now act, not having received the Holy Ghost, according to a Jewish principle. They present the lot to the Lord, that He may decide. Nevertheless the lot was not all, nor was it drawn without making a distinction. Apostolic authority flowed from the nomination of Christ Himself. Intelligence of the scriptures makes them understand that which ought to be. The object which the Lord had assigned to their service narrowed the choice to the little circle of those who could fulfill that object. Their history made them capable, as Jesus had said, of being His witnesses, because they had been with Him from the beginning, and could now testify that this same Jesus, whom the Jews had rejected and crucified, was indeed risen from among the dead.

4 Apostolic authority is exercised in Jerusalem on the Jewish principle, before the gift of the Holy Ghost. In this there was neither research nor the exercise of the human mind. "His bishopric let another take" guided their conduct; the capacity to testify of Jesus in His life on earth, and now of His resurrection and ascension, decided on the needed qualifications; the lot of Jehovah determined the individual who was to take Judas' place. Two are chosen, according to these needful qualifications, and the lot falls upon Matthias, who is numbered with the eleven apostles. But they were still without the promised power.

**CHAPTER 2** relates the fulfillment of this promise, in answer to the spirit of dependence manifested in their united prayers.

The Spirit comes from above, in His own power, to possess and fill the dwelling-place prepared for Him.

This event, important beyond all others with respect to man's condition here below, has here a very simple character, because there is no question of the causes of this marvelous gift, of the work on which it depends, of the glory with which it is connected and which it reveals, and of which it is the earnest: we have here only the fact of its power. The disciples "were endued with power from on high."

The form of its appearance, however, is characteristic. On Jesus the Holy Ghost descended in the shape of a dove, because He was not to make His voice heard in the streets, nor break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. But here it was the power of God in testimony, the word; which was like consuming fire, judging all that came before it. Nevertheless it was in grace, and was to go beyond the narrow limits of Jewish ordinances to proclaim the wonderful works of God to every tongue and nation under the sun. It was that mighty wind from heaven, which manifested itself to the disciples, and came upon them in the form of tongues of fire, each one divided into several. This marvel attracts the multitude; and the reality of this divine work is proved by the fact that persons from numerous countries hear these poor Galileans proclaim to them the wonderful works of God, each one in the language of the country whence he came up to Jerusalem.\* The Jews, who did not understand these languages, mock; and Peter declares to them in their own tongue, and according to their own prophecies, the true character of that which had

taken place. He takes his stand upon the resurrection of Christ, foretold by the prophet-king, and upon His exaltation by the right hand of God. This Jesus, whom they had crucified, had there received the promise of the Father, and shed forth that which produced the effects that they heard and saw. They were therefore to know assuredly, that God had made that same Jesus whom they had rejected both Lord and Christ.

[\* The rationalistic notion that it was a kind of excited gibberish, just as the unbelieving Jews thought, is absurd beyond conception. Think of Paul's thanking God that he spoke more kinds of gibberish than they all, and God giving a gift for interpreting gibberish!

5 The character of this testimony will be remarked here. It is essentially that of Peter. It goes no farther than the affirmation of the fact, that He who had been rejected by the Jews is made in heaven Lord and Christ. It begins with Jesus known of the Jews on earth, and establishes the truth of His being raised again, and exalted to the position of Lord. God has done this. The apostle does not even proclaim Him as the Son of God. We shall see that, if it is not done by Peter in the Acts, Paul on the contrary does it from the first moment of his conversion. Peter states the result at that moment in power, and does not speak of the kingdom. He only reminds them that the Spirit was promised in the last days, and alludes to the terrible day of the coming judgment, which would be preceded by alarming signs and wonders. Without speaking of the fulfillment of the promise of the kingdom, the time of which the Father had kept secret, he puts the fact of the gift of the Holy Ghost in connection with the responsibility of Israel, to whom God still acted in grace, by preaching to them a glorified Christ, and by giving them proofs of His glory in the gift of the Holy Ghost, made sensible to all. This is the presence of the Holy Ghost according to John 15:26, 27. The testimony as a whole, however, is founded on and carries out the mission of Luke 24. Only in Luke we have nothing of baptism. See Luke 24:47-49, to which this fully corresponds. The testimony was addressed to the Jews; nevertheless it was not confined to them,\* and it was separative. "Separate yourselves from this untoward generation." This separation was founded on a real and moral work — "repent": the past was all to be judged, and publicly demonstrated by their reception amongst Christians by baptism, in order to receive the remission of their sins, and participate in this heavenly gift of the Holy Ghost. "Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus

Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” This work is individual. There was judgment on all the past, the admission amongst them by baptism, and the consequent participation in the Holy Ghost, who dwelt where they came. We see at once the difference between the moral change already wrought, the repentance which their godly sorrow works, and the reception of the Holy Ghost. This was consequent on the remission of their sins to which they were brought. This gift depended in a regular way on their admission amongst Christians, the house where He dwelt, built in the name of Jesus. Afterwards the promise is declared to belong to them and to their children — to the house of Israel as such — to them and to their children after them. But it went beyond the limits of God’s ancient people. The promise was also to those that were afar off; for it was fulfilled, in connection with faith in Christ, to all who through grace should come into the new house — all whom the Lord, the God of Israel, should call. The call of God characterised the blessing. Israel, with her children, was owned, but a remnant called out from among them. The Gentiles, being called, shared the blessing.

[\* The testimony is in terms which, applying to Jews there and scattered abroad, yet opened the door to the Gentiles in the sovereignty of God — ”all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call.” God is still the God of man; but He calls whom He pleases.]

6 The result of this ineffable gift is related to us. It was not merely a moral change, but a power which set aside all the motives that individualised those who had received it, by uniting them as one soul and in one mind. They continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine; they were in communion with each other and the apostles; they broke bread; they spent their time in prayer. The sense of God’s presence was powerful among them; and many signs and wonders were wrought by the hands of the apostles. They were united in the closest bonds; no man called anything his own, but all divided their possessions with those that needed. They were daily in the temple, the public resort of Israel for religious exercises, whilst having their own apart — breaking bread at home daily. They ate with joy and gladness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people around them.

7 Thus the assembly was formed; and the Lord added to it daily the remnant of Israel, who were to be saved from the judgments that should fall on a nation which had rejected the Son of God, their Messiah; and, thank God, from yet deeper ruin. God brought into the assembly — thus owned of Him by the presence of the Holy Ghost — those whom He spared in Israel.\* A new order of things had commenced, marked by the presence of the Holy Ghost.\*\* Here was found the presence and the house of God, although the old order of things still existed until the execution of judgment upon it.

[\* This is the force of “those that were to be saved,” v. 47.]

[\*\* God never dwelt with man but on the ground of redemption, not with Adam nor Abraham. Compare Exodus 29:46.]

The assembly was formed therefore by the power of the Holy Ghost come down from heaven, on the testimony that Jesus, who had been rejected, was raised up to heaven, being made of God both Lord and Christ. It was composed of the Jewish remnant who were to be spared, with the reserve of bringing in Gentiles whenever God should call them. It was as yet formed in connection with Israel in the patience of God, yet apart in power, God’s dwelling place.

In **CHAPTER 3** the Spirit addresses His testimony to the people by the mouth of Peter. God still acted in patience towards His foolish people, and with more than patience. He acts in grace towards them, as His people, in virtue of the death and intercession of Christ — alas! in vain. Their unbelieving leaders silenced the word.\*

[\* It is striking to see the counsels of God and their accomplishment in grace, as far as they were now being fulfilled, so clearly distinguished from the responsibility of those with whom God was dealing. In chapter 2 Peter says, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” God was gathering, according to His own knowledge of what was coming. In chapter 3 he says, “God hath sent him to bless you in turning every one of you away from his iniquities.” So He had, and patience still waited, though God acted in present grace according to the result known to Himself:80 in Jeremiah often. Had they repented, God would surely have turned from judgment, as stated also in Jeremiah.]

The attention of the people is attracted by a miracle that restored strength to a poor lame man, known to all who frequented the temple; and, the multitude crowding to behold him, Peter preaches Christ to them. The God



of their fathers, said he, had glorified His servant Jesus, whom they had denied, when Pilate would have set Him free. They had denied the Holy One and the Just — desired a murderer — killed the Prince of Life; but God had raised Him from the dead. And His name, through faith, had healed the impotent man. Grace could esteem their act done as through ignorance, and that as to their rulers also. We here see the Holy Ghost responding to the intercession of Christ: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!” Guilty of the ten thousand talents, the great King remits it them, sending the message of mercy which calls them to repentance. To this Peter invites them: “Repent ye, and be converted; so\* that the time of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send Jesus, whom the heaven must receive,” he tells them, until the time ordained of God for the restoration which should accomplish all that the prophets had foretold. That is to say, he preaches repentance to the Jews as a nation, declaring that, on their repentance, Jesus, who had ascended up to heaven, would return; and the fulfillment of all the blessings spoken of by the prophets should take place on their behalf. The return of Jesus with this object depended (and still depends) on the repentance of the Jews. Meanwhile He remains in heaven.

[\* Not “when.” There is no pretense for so translating it.]

8 Moreover Jesus was the prophet announced by Moses: and whosoever would not hear Him should be cut off from the people. His voice still sounded in especial grace by the mouth of His disciples. All the prophets had spoken of these days. They were the children of the prophets, the natural heirs of the blessings which they had announced for Israel, as well as of the promises made to Abraham of a seed in whom all nations should be blessed. To them also in consequence, God, having raised up His servant Jesus,\* had sent Him to bless them, in turning away every one of them from his iniquities.

[\* This refers to the time of His life on the earth, though on His intercession there was a renewal of the mercy in testimony to a glorified Christ, who would return on their repentance.]

In a word, they are invited to return by repentance, and enjoy all the promises made to Israel. The Messiah Himself should return from heaven to establish their blessing. The whole nation is here addressed as natural heirs of the promises made to Abraham. But, while they were speaking,

the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to lay hands on them, being grieved that they preached the resurrection, which their unbelief and dogmatic system did not receive. They put them in prison, for it was evening. The hope of Israel was set aside; the grace of God had spoken in vain, great and patient as it was. Many, however, believed their word: five thousand persons already confessed the Lord Jesus.

9 We have seen the address which God, in His grace, sent to Israel by the mouth of Peter. We shall now see, not only the reception (already noticed) which it met with from the rulers of the people, but the deliberate answer of their inmost heart, as we may call it. On the morrow the rulers, the elders, and the scribes assemble at Jerusalem, together with Annas and his kindred; and, setting the apostles in their midst, they demand by what power or in what name they have wrought this miracle on the impotent man. Peter, full of the Holy Ghost, declares — announcing it to all Israel, and with the utmost readiness and entire boldness — that it was by Jesus, whom they had crucified, and whom God had raised from the dead. Thus the question between God and the rulers of Israel was very formally stated, and that by the Spirit of God. Jesus was the stone rejected by them, the builders, which had become the head of the corner. Salvation could nowhere else be found. No carefulness not to offend, with regard to the adversaries and the rulers; with the people, as such, ignorant and misled, everything to win them. The council recognised them as former companions of Christ: the man who had been healed was there. What could they say or do in the face of the multitude who had witnessed the miracle? They could only exhibit a will in decided opposition to the Lord and His testimony, and yield to the public opinion, which was necessary to their own importance, by which too they were governed. With threats they commanded the apostles to teach no more in the name of Jesus. We may remark here, that Satan had Sadducean instruments arrayed against the doctrine of the resurrection, as he had Pharisees as suited instruments against a living Christ. We must expect the well-ordered opposition of Satan against the truth.

Now Peter and John allow of no ambiguity with respect to their course. God had commanded them to preach Christ: the prohibition of man had no weight with them. “We cannot,” say they, “but speak the things which we

have seen and heard.” What a position for the rulers of the people! Accordingly, a testimony like this plainly demonstrates that the leaders of Israel were fallen from the place of interpreters of the will of God. The apostles do not drive them away — do not attack them: God would judge them; but they act immediately on the part of God, and disregard their authority altogether with respect to the work that God had committed to themselves. The testimony of God was with the apostles, and not with the rulers of the temple; and the presence of God was in the assembly, and not there.

Peter and John return to their own company, for a separate people who knew each other was formed; and all, moved by the Holy Ghost (for it was there that God dwelt by His Spirit, not now in the temple), lift up their voice to God, the Governor of all things, to acknowledge that this opposition of the rulers was but the accomplishment of the word and the counsels and the purposes of God. These threatenings were but the occasion of asking God to manifest His power in connection with the name of Jesus. In a word, the world (including the Jews, who formed a part of it in their opposition) had stood up against Jesus, the Servant of God, and opposed itself to the testimony rendered to Him. The Holy Ghost is the strength of this testimony, whether in the courage of those who bore witness (v. 8), or in His presence in the assembly (v. 31), or in the energy of service (v. 33), or in the fruits that are again produced among the saints with a power which makes it manifest that the Holy Ghost has dominion in their hearts over all the motives that influence man, making them walk by those of which He is the source. It is the energy of the Spirit in the presence of opposition, as before it was His natural fruit in those among whom He dwelt. Fresh persons sell their goods, and lay their price at the apostles’ feet; among others, a man whom the Holy Ghost takes pleasure in distinguishing — Barnabas, from the island of Cyprus.

To sum up this chapter demonstrates, on one side, the condition of the Jews, their rejection of the testimony which was addressed to them in grace; and on the other, the power of the Holy Ghost and God’s presence and guidance elsewhere, namely, in the midst of the disciples.

These three chapters (2-4) present the first forming of the assembly, and its blessed character through the Holy Spirit dwelling in it. They present to us its first beauty as formed of God, and His habitation.

Alas! evil shows itself there also (chap. 5). If the mighty Spirit of God is there, the flesh also is there. There are some who wished to have the credit of devotedness which the Holy Ghost produces, although devoid of that faith in God, and that self-renunciation, which, showing itself in the path of love, constitutes all the value and all the truth of this devotedness. But it only gives fresh occasion to manifest the power of the Spirit of God, the presence of God within, against evil; as the preceding chapter showed His energy outside, and the precious fruits of His grace. If there be not the simple fruit and of good already described, there is the power of good against evil. The present state of the assembly, as a whole, is the power of evil over good. God cannot endure evil where He dwells; still less than where He does not dwell. However great the energy of the testimony which He sends to those who are outside, He exercises all patience until there is no remedy within. The more His presence is realised and manifested (and even in proportion as that is done), the more He shows Himself intolerant of evil. It cannot be otherwise. He judges in the midst of His saints, where He will have holiness; and that according to the measure of the manifestation of Himself. Ananias and Sapphira disregarding the presence of the Holy Ghost, whose impulse they pretended to follow, fall down dead before the God whom, in their blindness, they sought to deceive in forgetting Him. God was in the assembly.

Mighty, though painful, testimony to His presence! Fear pervades every heart, both within and outside. In fact, the presence of God is a serious thing, however great its blessing. The effect of this manifestation of the power of a God present with those whom He acknowledged as His own was very great. Multitudes joined themselves by faith to the confession of the name of the Lord — at least from among the people, for the rest dared not. The more position we have in the world, the more we fear the world which gave it us. This miraculous testimony to the power of God was also displayed in a still more remarkable way, so that people came from far to profit by it. The apostles were constantly together in Solomon's porch.

But alas! the manifestation of the power of God, in connection with the despised disciples of Jesus, and working outside the beaten track in which the self-importance of the high priest and those that were with him found its path, together with the progress made by that which they rejected, and the attention drawn to the apostles by the miracles that were wrought, excite the opposition and jealousy of the rulers; and they put the apostles in prison. In this world good ever works in the presence of the power of evil.

A power different from that of the Holy Ghost in the assembly now displays itself. The providence of God, watching over His work, and acting through the ministry of angels, frustrates all the plans of the unbelieving heads of Israel. The priests shut up the apostles in prison. An angel of the Lord opens the prison doors, and sends the apostles to pursue their accustomed work in the temple. The officers whom the council send to the prison find it shut, and everything in order; but no apostles.

Meanwhile the council are informed that they are in the temple, teaching the people. Confounded and alarmed, the council send to fetch them; but the officers bring them without violence, fearing the people. For God holds everything in check, until His testimony be rendered, when He will have it rendered. The high priest remonstrates with them on the ground of his former prohibition. Peter's reply is more concise than on the former occasion, and is rather the announcement of a settled purpose, than the rendering a testimony by reasoning with those who will not hearken, and who showed themselves to be adversaries. It is the same in substance as what he had said when previously brought before the rulers: God is to be obeyed rather than men. Opposed to God, the heads of Israel were merely men. In saying this, all was decided: the opposition between them and God was evident. The God of their fathers had raised up Jesus, whom the rulers of Israel had crucified. The apostles were His witnesses, and so was the Holy Ghost, whom God had given to those who obeyed Him. All was said; the position clearly announced. Peter, in the name of the apostles, formally takes it on the part of God and of Christ, and in agreement with the seal of the Holy Ghost, who, given to believers, bore witness in the Savior's name. Nevertheless there is no pride, no self-will. He must obey God. He still takes his place in Israel ("the God," he says, "of our fathers"); but the place of testimony for God in Israel. The advice of

Gamaliel prevails to turn aside the purposes of the council, for God has always His instruments ready, unknown perhaps to us, where we are doing His will; nevertheless they cause the apostles to be beaten, and command them not to preach, and send them away. They were at a loss what to do — only made the opposition of their will the more evident, while how simple the path when sent of God, and consciously doing His will! We must obey God.

The object of this latter part of the chapter is to show that the providential care of God, whether miraculously by means of angels, or by disposing the hearts of men to accomplish His purposes, was exercised on behalf of the assembly, even as the Spirit of God bore testimony in it and manifested in it His power. The apostles, in no wise terrified, return, full of joy at being counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus; and every day, in the temple, or from house to house, they cease not to teach and to preach the good news of Jesus the Christ. However weak they might be, God Himself maintains His testimony.

Other evils, unhappily, assail the church (chap. 6). The flesh begins to show itself, in the midst of the power of the Holy Ghost, the trouble arising from the different circumstances of the disciples, and in those things in which grace had been especially manifested, on the side on which they were connected with the flesh. The Hellenists (Jews born in Grecian or heathen countries) murmur against the Hebrews (natives of Judea), because the widows of the latter were favored, as they imagined, in the distribution of the goods bestowed on the assembly by its wealthier members. But here the wisdom given by the Spirit meets the difficulty, profiting by the occasion to give development to the work, according to the necessities that were growing up; and seven persons are named to undertake this business, for which the apostles would not forsake their own work. We also find, in the case of Philip and Stephen, the truth of what Paul says: "Those who have used the office of a deacon well, purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Observe here, that the apostles put prayer before preaching in their work, their conflict with the power of evil being more especially carried on in it, as well as their realisation of the power of God for the strength and

wisdom they needed; and, in order that they might act directly on God's part, it was necessary that grace and unction should be maintained in their hearts.

Observe also the grace that discovers itself under the influence of the Spirit of God in this matter: all the names, as far as we can judge, are those of Hellenists.

The influence of the word extended, and many priests were obedient to the faith. Thus, until now, the opposition from without, and the evil within, did but minister occasion to the progress of the work of God, by the manifestation of His presence in the midst of the church. Take especial notice of this fact. It is not only that the Spirit does good by His testimony, but, although evil is there without and within, yet where power displays itself, that evil does but bear witness to the efficacy of His presence. There was evil, but there was power to meet it. Still it showed there was leaven even in the Pentecostal cake.

The energy of the Spirit manifests itself especially in Stephen, who is full of grace and power. The Hellenist Jews oppose him; and, not being able to answer him, they accuse him before the council, and in particular of having announced in the name of Jesus the destruction of the temple and of the city, and the change of the customs of their law. Here, observe, we see the free power of the Holy Ghost, without any sending by any other to the work, as in the apostles appointed by Christ Himself. It is not authority in the apostles, it is not in the Jews of Palestine. He distributes to whom He will. It is the godly and devoted Hellenist who renders the last testimony to the heads of the nation. If priests believe on the one side, Jews from without Judea bear testimony on the other, and prepare the way for a still more extended testimony; but at the same time for the definitive rejection, morally, of the Jews as the basis and center of the testimony, and of the work of gathering together. For as yet Jerusalem was the center of testimony and gathering. Peter had testified of a glorious Christ promising His return on their repentance, and they had stopped His testimony. Now judgment is pronounced on them by the Holy Ghost through the mouth of Stephen, in whom they show themselves open adversaries to this testimony. It is not the apostles who, by official authority, break off with Jerusalem. The free action of the Holy Ghost anticipates a breach, which

did not take place so as to form a part of the scripture narrative. The thing is done by the power of God; and the taking up to heaven of the witness raised up by the Spirit to denounce the Jews as adversaries, and to declare their fallen condition, placed the center of gathering in heaven according to the Spirit — that heaven to which the faithful witness, who was filled with the Spirit, had gone up. Already, while on earth, he had the appearance of an angel to the eyes of the council who judged him; but the hardness of their hearts would not let them stop in the path of hostility towards the testimony rendered to Christ — a testimony which comes out here in a special way as the testimony of the Holy Ghost.

Stephen,\* as far as we are told, had not known the Lord during His life on earth. Certainly he was not appointed, like the apostles, to be a witness of that life. He was simply the instrument of the Holy Ghost, distributing to whom He would.

[\* He is the expression of the power of the Holy Ghost witnessing to Christ glorified, who had been now thus presented to Israel, who had already rejected Him in humiliation. From the fall to the flood, man, though not left without witness, was otherwise left to himself. There were no special ways and institutions of God. The result was the flood, to cleanse, so to speak, the earth from its horrible pollution and violence. In the new world God began to deal with man. Government was set up in Noah. But in Abraham one was, by electing grace, called out, and God's promises given to him when the world had turned to demons. This began the history of God's people, but the question of righteousness was not raised. This the law did, claiming it from man. Then prophets came in patient grace. Then, the last appeal of God for fruits, and testimony of grace, the Son was sent. He was now rejected, and on His intercession the Holy Ghost had witnessed to His glory by Peter (Acts 3) for their repentance, and now dealt with them as to it by Stephen.]

He begins therefore their history from the beginning of God's way, that is, from Abraham, called out by the revelation of the God of glory, slow indeed to obey, but at length led by the patient grace of God into Canaan. Nevertheless, he was a stranger in the promised land; and bondage was to be the portion of his descendants, until God interposed in grace. The lot, therefore, of the blessed patriarch was not that of possessing the promises, but of being a stranger; and that of his descendants was to be captives until God delivered them with a strong arm. Nothing can be more striking than the calm superiority to circumstances displayed by Stephen. He recites to the Jews a history they could not deny, a history they boasted in, yet it



condemned them utterly. They were doing as their fathers had done. But two persons are specially prominent in Stephen's account, in connection with the goodness of God towards Israel at this period — Joseph and Moses. Israel had rejected them both, given up Joseph to the Gentiles, rejected Moses as judge and leader. It was, in cases which the Jews could not deny or object to, the history of Christ also, who, too, at the time appointed of God, will indeed be the Redeemer of Israel. This is the substance of Stephen's argument. The Jews had always rejected those whom God had sent and in whom the Holy Ghost had acted, and the testimony of the same Holy Ghost in the prophets who had spoken of the Christ whom they had now betrayed and slain. Besides this, according to Moses, they had worshipped false gods, even from the time of their deliverance out of Egypt\* a sin which, however great the long-suffering of God, would cause them to be carried away, now that they had filled up the measure of their iniquity, beyond the Babylon which had already been their punishment.

[\* Observe, too, here, that however long the patience of God had lasted, repentance not being its result, the first sin, the first departure from God, bears its penalty at the end.]

It is a most striking summing up of their whole history — the history of man with all the means of restoration supplied. The full measure of guilt is stated. They had received the law and had not kept it, rejected the prophets who had testified of Christ, and betrayed and murdered Christ Himself — always resisted the Holy Ghost. What they did trust in, the temple, God rejected. God Himself has been, as it were, a stranger in the land of Canaan; and if Solomon built Him a house, it was in order that the Holy Ghost might declare that He who had heaven for His throne, and earth for His footstool, whose dominion was universal, would not dwell in houses of stone, which were the creation of His own hand. Thus we have the complete summing up of their history, connected with the last days of their judgment. They always resisted the Holy Ghost, as they had always disobeyed the law. Judaism was judged, after the long patience of God and all His ways of grace with man as means were exhausted. For Israel was man under the special dealings and care of God. Man's guilt now is not only sin, but sin in spite of all that God has done. It was the turning-point of man's history. Law, prophets, Christ, the Holy Ghost, all tried, and man at enmity against God. The cross had really proved it, but this had

added the rejection of the testimony of the Holy Ghost to a glorified Christ. All was over with man, and began anew with the second Man ever in connection with heaven.

Their conscience convicted, and their heart hardened, their will unchanged, the members of the council were filled with rage, and gnashed upon him with their teeth. But if Stephen was to bear this definitive testimony against Israel, he was not merely to render the testimony, but much more to place it in its true relative position, by a living expression of that which a believer was in virtue of the presence of the Holy Ghost here below dwelling in him. In their history we have man always resisting the Holy Ghost; in Stephen, a man full of Him consequent on redemption.

Such are the elements of this touching and striking scene, which forms an epoch in the history of the assembly. The heads of Israel gnash their teeth with rage, against the mighty and convincing testimony of the Holy Ghost, with which Stephen was filled. They had rejected a glorified Christ, as they had slain a humbled one. Let us follow out the effect as to Stephen himself. He looks stedfastly up to heaven; now fully opened to faith. It is thither that the Spirit directs the mind, making it capable of fixing itself there. He reveals to one who is thus filled with Himself the glory of God on high, and Jesus in that glory at the right hand of God, in the place of power — Son of man in the far higher place than that of Psalm 2, that of Psalm 8, though all things were not yet put under Him (compare John 1:50, 51). Afterwards He gives the effect of the testimony born in the presence of the power of Satan, the murderer.

“I see,” said Stephen, “the heavens opened.” Such then is the position of the true believer — heavenly upon the earth — in presence of the world that rejected Christ, the murderous world; the believer, alive in death, sees by the power of the Holy Ghost into heaven, and the Son of man at the right hand of God. Stephen does not say “Jesus.” The Spirit characterises Him as the Son of man! Precious testimony to man! Nor is it to the glory of God that he testifies (this was natural to heaven) but to the Son of man in the glory, heaven being open to him, and then looks to Him as the Lord Jesus, to receive his spirit, the first example and full testimony of the state of the believer’s soul after death with Christ glorified.

With regard to the progress of the testimony, it is not now that Jesus is the Messiah, and He will return if you repent (which, however, does not cease to be true), but it is the Son of man in heaven, which is open to the man that is filled with the Holy Ghost — that heaven to which God is about to transport the soul, as it is the hope and the testimony of those that are His. The patience of God was doubtless still acting in Israel; but the Holy Ghost opened new scenes and new hopes to the believer.\* But remark that Stephen, in consequence of seeing Jesus in heaven, perfectly resembles Jesus upon earth — a fact precious in grace to us: only that the glory of His Person is in all cases carefully guarded. Jesus, though heaven was opened to Him, was Himself the object to which heaven looked down, and who was publicly owned and sealed of the Father. He did not need a vision to present an object to His faith, nor did it produce any transformation into the same image by revelation of the glory. But “Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit” is found in “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” And the affection for Israel which expresses itself in intercession, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” is found again in “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge”; save that here the Holy Ghost does not now affirm that they are ignorant.

[\* The Holy Ghost opens heaven to our view, and enables us to contemplate that which is found there; and forms us on earth according to the character of Jesus. As to the change that took place in the progress of God’s dealings, it appears to me that it was the realisation by the Spirit of the effect of the veil being rent. Jesus is seen still standing; because, until the rejection by Israel of the testimony of the Holy Ghost, He did not definitely sit down, waiting for the judgment of His enemies. Rather He remained, in the position of High Priest, standing; the believer with Him on high by the Spirit, and the soul having thus far joined Him there in heaven; for now, by the blood of Christ, by that new and living way, it could enter within the veil. On the other hand, the Jews having done the same thing with regard to the testimony of the Holy Ghost that they did with regard to Jesus, having (so to speak) in Stephen sent a messenger after Him to say, “We will not have this man to reign over us,” Christ definitively takes His place, seated in heaven, until He shall judge the enemies who would not that He should reign over them. It is in this last position that He is viewed in the Epistle to the Hebrews; in which consequently they are exhorted to come out of the camp of Israel, following after the victim whose blood had been carried into the sanctuary; thus anticipating the judgment, which fell upon Jerusalem intermediately by means of the Romans, in order to set the nation aside, as it will be finally executed by Jesus Himself. The position of Stephen therefore resembles that of Jesus, the testimony being that of the Spirit to Jesus glorified. This makes the great principle of the Epistle to the Hebrews very plain. The doctrine of the church, announced by Paul after the

revelation made to him on his way to Damascus, goes further than this; that is, it declares the union of Christians with Jesus in heaven, and not merely their entrance into the holy place through the rent veil, where the priest might only go in previously, behind the veil which hid God from the people.]

But it is well to dwell a moment on that which brings out more clearly the especial position of Stephen, the vessel of the Spirit's testimony, so definitively rejected by the Jews; and the divine character and Person of Jesus, even where His disciple is most like Him. Heaven is open to Jesus, the Holy Ghost descends upon Him and He is acknowledged the Son of God. Heaven opens on Jesus, and the angels descend upon the Son of man: but He has no object presented to Him; He is Himself the object on which heaven is gazing. Heaven will open at the end of the age, and Jesus Himself come forth on the white horse (that is, in judgment and triumph). Here, too, heaven opens, and the disciple, the Christian, full of the Holy Ghost, sees into it, and there beholds Jesus at the right hand of God. Jesus is still the object, before of heaven, now of the believing man who is filled with the Holy Ghost; so that, as to the object of faith and the position of the believer, this scene is definitively characteristic. Jesus has no object, but is the object of heaven when it opens; the saint has, and it is Jesus Himself in heaven when it is open. Rejected, and rejected by the Jews, like Jesus, partaking in His sufferings, and filled with His Spirit of grace, Stephen's eyes are fixed on high, on the heaven which the Holy Ghost opens to him; and he sees the Son of man there ready to receive his spirit. The rest will come later; but it is not only Jesus, whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution, but also the souls of His believing people until the moment of resurrection, and the whole church, in spirit, detached from the world that rejected Him, and from Judaism that opposed the testimony of the Holy Ghost. The latter, Judaism, is no longer at all recognised; there is no longer any room for the long-suffering of God towards it. Its place is taken by heaven, and by the assembly, which, so far as it is consistent, follows her Master there in spirit, while waiting for His return.

Saul was present at Stephen's death, and consenting to it.\*

[\* We may remark here, that the sanctuary, so to speak, is open to all believers. The veil indeed was rent by the death of Christ, but the grace of God was still acting towards the Jews, as such, and proposed to them the return of Jesus to the earth; that is to say, outside the veil, in the event of their repentance, so that the blessing would then have been upon the earth —

the times of refreshing by the coming of Christ, which the prophets had announced. But now it is no longer a Messiah, the Son of David, but a Son of man in heaven; and, by the Holy Ghost here below, an opened heaven is seen and known, and the great High Priest (standing as yet) at the right hand of God is not hidden behind a veil. All is open to the believer; the glory, and He who has entered into it for His people. And this, it appears to me, is the reason why He is seen standing. He had not definitely taken His place as seated (in perpetuity) on the heavenly throne, until the testimony of the Holy Ghost to Israel of His exaltation had been definitively rejected on earth. The free testimony of the Spirit which is developed, here and afterwards, is highly interesting, without touching apostolic authority in its place, as we shall see. As to the Jews, till the High Priest comes out, they cannot know that His work is accepted for the nation; as, in the day of atonement, they had to wait till he came out that they might know it. But for us the Holy Ghost is come out while He is within, and we know it.]

This is the end of the first phase of the assembly of God — its history in immediate connection with Jerusalem and the Jews, as the center to which the work of the apostles related, “beginning at Jerusalem”; carried on, however, in a believing remnant, but inviting Israel, as such, to come into it, as being nationally the object of the love and care of God, but they would not. Some accessory events follow, which enlarge the sphere of labor and maintain the unity of the whole, previously to the revelation of the call of the Gentiles, as such, properly speaking, and of the assembly as one body, independent of Jerusalem, and apart from the earth. These events are — the work of Philip in the conversion of Samaria and of the Ethiopian; that of Cornelius, with Peter’s vision that took place after the vocation of Saul, who himself is brought in by a Jew of good report among the Jews as such; the labors of Peter in all the land of Canaan; and, finally, the connection established between the apostles at Jerusalem and the converted Gentiles at Antioch; the opposition of Herod, the false king of the Jews, and the care which God still takes of Peter, and the judgment of God upon the king. Afterwards comes the direct work among the Gentiles, having Antioch for its starting-point, already prepared by the conversion of Paul, through means and with a revelation that were quite peculiar. Let us follow the details of these chapters.

After the death of Stephen persecution breaks out. The victory, gained by a hatred the accomplishment of whose object was allowed by Providence, opens the floodgates to the violence of the Jewish leaders, enemies to the gospel. The barrier that restrained them once broken, the waves of passion overflow on all sides. People are often held back by a little remaining

conscience, by habits, by a certain idea of the rights of others; but when the dykes are broken, hatred (the spirit of murder in the heart) satiates itself, if God permit, by actions that show what man is when left to himself. But all this hatred accomplishes the will of God, in which man would perhaps otherwise have failed, and which in some respects he could not or ought not even to have executed, that is to say, the will of God in sovereign judgment. The dispersion of the assembly was Israel's judgment — a judgment which the disciples would have found it difficult to declare and to execute by the communication of greater light to them; for whatever may be the blessing and energy in the sphere where the grace of God acts, the ways of God in directing all things are in His own hand. Our part, too, in His ways as to those without, is in grace.

The whole assembly then, except the apostles, is scattered. It is questionable also, that the apostles did right in remaining, and whether a more simple faith would not have made them go away, and thus have spared the assembly many a conflict and many a difficulty in connection with the fact that Jerusalem continued to be a center of authority.\* The Lord had even said with Israel in view, "When they persecute in one city, flee into another"; and after His resurrection He commands them to go and disciple all nations. This last mission we do not find executed in the history of the Acts and the work among the Gentiles, and, as we see in Galatians 2, by a special agreement entered into at Jerusalem, it fell into the hands of Paul, being placed on an entirely new footing. The word tells us nothing of the accomplishment of this mission of the twelve towards the Gentiles, unless it be the slight general intimation in the end of Mark. God is mighty in Peter toward the circumcision and in Paul towards the Gentiles. It may be said that the twelve were not persecuted. It is possible, and I say nothing decided on the point; but it is certain that the passages which I have quoted have no fulfillment in the Bible history, and that another arrangement, another order of things, took place in lieu of that which the Lord prescribed, and that Jewish prejudices had in fact an influence, resulting from this concentration at Jerusalem, from which even Peter had the greatest difficulty to free himself.

[\* This is no wise prevents the manifestation of the sovereign wisdom of God. The development of the doctrine of the assembly in its oneness, and as the body of Christ, was but so much the more perfect and unmixed, as we find it taught by Paul; who was called outside of Judaism by the revelation of a

heavenly Christ. Neither do these ways of sovereign wisdom in God make any change at all in the responsibility of man. The outward unity of the assembly was also preserved by this means, by the connection kept up between the other places and Jerusalem, until the work among the Gentiles outside Judaism made these connections extremely difficult and precarious. This, however, rendered the grace and the wisdom of God but so much the more apparent.]

Those who were scattered abroad preached the word everywhere, but only to the Jews, before some of them arrived at Antioch (chap. 11:19).

Philip however went down to Samaria, and preached Christ to them, and wrought miracles. They all give heed to him and are even baptised. A man who until then had bewitched them with sorcery, so that they had said he was the great power of God, even he also submits to the power which eclipsed his false marvels, and convinced him so much the more of its reality as he was conscious of the falseness of his own. The apostles make no difficulty with regard to Samaria. The history of Jesus must have enlightened them in that respect. Moreover, the Samaritans were not Gentiles. Still it was a Hellenist who preached the gospel there.

A new truth comes out here in connection with the regular process of the assembly — namely, that the apostles conferred the Holy Ghost by means of prayer and the laying on of hands: a very important fact in the history of God's dealings. Moreover Samaria was a conquest which all the energy of Judaism had never been able to make. It was a new and splendid triumph for the gospel. Spiritual energy to subdue the world appertained to the assembly. Jerusalem was set aside: its day was over in that respect.

The presence of the power of the Holy Ghost acting in Peter preserves the assembly as yet from the entrance of hypocrites, the instruments of Satan. The great and powerful fact that God was there manifested itself and made the darkness evident which circumstances had concealed. Carried along by the strong current, Simon had yielded, as to his intelligence, to the authority of Christ whose name was glorified by Philip's ministry. But the true condition of his heart, the desire of his own glory, the complete opposition between his moral condition and all principle — all light from God — betrays itself in presence of the fact that a man can impart the Holy Ghost. He desires to buy this power with money. What a thought! It is thus that the unbelief which appears quite to pass away, so that the things of God are outwardly received, betrays itself by something which,

to one who has the Spirit, is so grossly contrary to God that its true character is manifest even to a child taught by God Himself.

Samaria is thus brought into connection with the center of the work of Jerusalem, where the apostles still were. Already the Holy Ghost's being bestowed on the Samaritans was an immense step in the development of the assembly. Doubtless they were circumcised, they acknowledged the law, although the temple had in a certain degree lost its importance. The body of believers was more consolidated, and, so far as they still held to Jerusalem, it was a positive gain; for Samaria, by receiving the gospel, entered into connection with her ancient rival, as much as the apostles themselves were so, and submitted to her. Probably the apostles, during that time of persecution, did not go to the temple. God had opened a wide door to them outside, and thus made them ample amends in their work, for the success of the rulers of Israel who had stopped it in Jerusalem; for the energy of the Spirit was with them. To sum up: that which is presented here is the free energy of the Spirit in others than the apostles, and outside Jerusalem which had rejected it; and the relations maintained with the apostles and Jerusalem by their central action, and the authority and power with which they were invested.

Having accomplished their work, and themselves evangelised several villages of the Samaritans, Peter and John return to Jerusalem. The work outside goes on, and by other means. Philip, who presents the character of prompt unquestioning obedience in simplicity of heart, is called to leave his prosperous work with which all his personal importance (if he had been seeking it) was connected, and in which he was surrounded with respect and affection. "Go," said the angel of the Lord, "toward the south, unto the way that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza." It was a desert. Philip's ready obedience does not think of the difference between Samaria and Gaza, but of the Lord's will: and he goes. The gospel now extends to the proselytes from among the Gentiles, and makes its way to the center of Abyssinia. The Queen's treasurer is admitted among the disciples of the Lord by baptism, which sealed his faith in the testimony of the prophet Isaiah; and he goes on his way, rejoicing in the salvation which he had taken a toilsome journey from a far country to seek in legal duties and ceremonies, but with faith in God's word, in Jerusalem. Beautiful picture of the grace of the gospel! He carries away with him, and to his home, that



which grace had bestowed on him in the wilderness — that which his wearisome journey to Jerusalem had not procured him. The poor Jews, who had driven away the testimony from Jerusalem, are outside everything. The Spirit of the Lord carries Philip far away, and he is found at Azotus; for all the power of the Lord is at the service of the Son of man for the accomplishment of the testimony to His glory. Philip evangelises all the cities unto Caesarea.

A work and a workman of another character begin now to dawn upon the scene.

We have seen the inveterate opposition of the heads of Israel to the testimony of the Holy Ghost, their obstinacy in repelling the patient grace of God. Israel rejected all the work of the God of grace in their behalf. Saul makes himself the apostle of their hatred to the disciples of Jesus, to the servants of God. Not content with searching them out at Jerusalem, he asks for letters from the high priest, that he may go and lay hands on them in foreign cities. When Israel is in full opposition to God, he is the ardent missionary of their malice — in ignorance, no doubt, but the willing slave of his Jewish prejudices.

Thus occupied, he approaches Damascus. There, in the full career of an unbroken will, the Lord Jesus stops him. A light from heaven shines round about him, and envelopes him in its dazzling brightness. He falls to the earth, and hears a voice saying unto him, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” The glory which had thrown him to the ground left no doubt — accompanied as it was by that voice — that the authority of God was revealed in it. His will broken, his pride overthrown, his mind subdued, he asks, “Who art thou, Lord?” The authority of the One who spoke was unquestionable; Saul’s heart was subject to that authority: and it was Jesus. The career of his self-will was ended for ever. But moreover the Lord of glory was not only Jesus; He also acknowledged the poor disciples, whom Saul desired to carry prisoners to Jerusalem, as being Himself.

How many things were revealed in those few words! The Lord of glory declared Himself to be Jesus, whom Saul persecuted. The disciples were one with Himself. The Jews were at open war with the Lord Himself. The whole system which they maintained, all their law, all their official

authority, all the ordinances of God, had not prevented their being at open war with the Lord. Saul himself, armed with their authority, found himself occupied in destroying the name of the Lord and His people from off the earth: a terrible discovery, completely overwhelming his soul, all-powerful in its effects, not leaving one moral element of his soul standing before its strength. Extenuation of the evil was fruitless; zeal for Judaism was zeal against the Lord. His own conscience had only animated that zeal. The authorities constituted of God, surrounded with the halo of centuries of honor, enhanced by the present calamities of Israel which had now nothing but her religion — these authorities had but sanctioned and favored his efforts against the Lord. The Jesus whom they rejected was the Lord. The testimony which they endeavored to suppress was His testimony. What a change for Saul! What a new position, even for the minds of the apostles themselves who remained at Jerusalem, when all were dispersed — faithful indeed in spite of the opposition of the rulers of Israel, but themselves in connection with the nation.

But the work went deeper yet. Misguided no doubt, but his conscience in itself — for he thought he ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth — left him the enemy of the Lord. Blameless righteousness according to law, as man could measure it, more than left him hardened in open opposition to the Lord. His superiors, and the authorities of the ancient religion — all his soul was based on morally as well as religiously — all was smashed within him for ever. He was broken up in the whole man before God. Nothing remained in him but discovered enmity against God, save as his own will was also broken in the process, he who an hour before was the conscientious, blameless, religious man! Compare, though the revelation of Christ carried him much farther, Galatians 2:20; Philippians 3; 2 Corinthians 1:9; 4:10; and a multitude of passages.

Other important points are brought out here. Saul had not known Jesus on earth. He had not a testimony because he had known Him from the beginning, declaring that He was made Lord and Christ. It is not a Jesus who goes up into heaven where He is out of sight; but the Lord who appears to him for the first time in heaven, and who announces to him that He is Jesus. A glorious Lord is the only one whom he knows. His gospel (as he expresses it himself) is the gospel of the glory. If he had known

Christ after the flesh, he knows Him thus no more. But there is yet another important principle found here. The Lord of glory has His members on earth. "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." It was Himself: those poor disciples were bone of His bones and flesh of His flesh. He looked upon them and cherished them as His own flesh. The glory and the oneness of the saints with Jesus, their Head in heaven, are the truths connected with the conversion of Saul, with the revelation of Jesus to him, with the creation of faith in his heart, and that in a way which overthrew Judaism in all its bearings in his soul; and that in a soul in which this Judaism formed an integral part of its existence, and gave it its whole character.

Another point, borrowed from his account of the vision later in the book, which is remarkable in connection with his career: "Separating thee," says the Lord, "from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I now send thee." This moral end of Saul separated him from both — of course from the Jews, but did not make a Gentile of him either — and united him with a glorified Christ. He was neither a Jew nor a Gentile in his spiritual standing. All his life and ministry flowed from his association with a heavenly glorified Christ.

Nevertheless he comes into the assembly by the usual means — like Jesus in Israel — humbly taking his place there where the truth of God was established by His power. Blind for three days and fully engrossed — as was natural — with such a discovery, he neither eats nor drinks; and afterwards, besides the fact of his blindness, which was a quiet, continual, and unequivocal proof of the truth of that which had happened to him, his faith must have been confirmed by the arrival of Ananias, who can declare to him from the Lord that which had happened to him, although he had not been out of the city — a circumstance so much the more striking because, in a vision, Saul had seen him come and restore his sight. And this Ananias does: Saul receives sight, and is baptised. He takes food and is strengthened. The conversation of Jesus with Ananias is remarkable, as showing with what distinct evidence the Lord revealed Himself in those days, and the holy liberty and confidence with which the true and faithful disciple conversed with Him. The Lord speaks as a man to his friend in details of place and circumstances, and Ananias reasons in all confiding openness with the Lord in regard to Saul; and Jesus answers him, not in

harsh authority, though of course Ananias had to obey, but with gracious explanation, as with one admitted to His confidence, by declaring that Saul is a chosen vessel to bear His name before Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel; and that He will show him how great things he must suffer for His sake.

Saul makes no delay in confessing and declaring his faith; and that which he says is eminently worthy of notice. He preaches in the synagogue that Jesus is the Son of God. It is the first time that this is done. That He was exalted to the right hand of God — that He was Lord and Christ — had been already preached; the rejected Messiah was exalted on high. But here it is the simple doctrine as to His personal glory; Jesus is the Son of God.

In the words of Jesus to Ananias, the children of Israel come last.

Saul does not yet begin his public ministry. It is, so to speak, only the expression of his personal faithfulness, his zeal, his faith, among those that surrounded him, with whom he was naturally connected. It was not long before opposition manifested itself, in the nation that would have no Christ, at least according to God, and the disciples sent him away, letting him down by the wall in a basket; and through the agency of Barnabas (a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith, whom grace had taught to value the truth with regard to the new disciple) the dreaded Saul found his place among the disciples even at Jerusalem.\* Wonderful triumph of the Lord! Singular position for himself there, had he not been absorbed by the thought of Jesus. At Jerusalem he reasons with the Hellenists. He was one of them. The Hebrews were not his natural sphere. They seek to put him to death; the disciples bring him down to the sea, and send him to Tarsus, the place of his birth. The triumph of grace has, under God's hand, silenced the adversary. The assemblies are left in peace, and edify themselves — walking in the fear of God and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, the two great elements of blessing; and their numbers increase. Persecution accomplishes the designs of God. The peace which He grants gives opportunity for ripening in grace and in the knowledge of Himself. We learn the ways and government of God in the midst of the imperfection of man.

[\* This was, it would appear, later, but is noticed here to put him, so to speak, in his place among Christians.]

Peace being established through the goodness of God — sole resource of those who truly wait upon Him in submission to His will — Peter passes throughout all parts of Israel. The Spirit of God relates this circumstance here, between the conversion of Saul and his apostolic work, to show us, I doubt not, the apostolic energy in Peter existing at the very time when the call of the new apostle was to bring in new light, and a work that was new in many important respects (thus sanctioning as His own work, and in its place, that which had been done before, whatever progress in accomplishment His counsels might make); and in order to show us the introduction of the Gentiles into the assembly as it was at first founded by His grace in the beginning, preserving thus its unity, and putting His seal upon this work of heavenly grace.

The assembly existed. The doctrine of her oneness, as the body of Christ, outside the world, was not yet made known. The reception of Cornelius did not announce it, although paving its way.

The undiminished power of Peter, his apostolic authority, in the midst of which the entrance of Cornelius into the spiritual house of God takes place, in connection with Peter's ministry, and that, after the calling of Saul, which opened a new perspective — all these facts taken together confirmed that which went before. The original work was in no wise set aside to bring in another. Nevertheless, Peter's vision did not reveal the assembly as the body of Christ, neither did the admission of Cornelius. They only showed that in every nation he who feared God was acceptable to Him — in a word, that the favor of God was not limited to the Jews, and that there was no need of becoming a Jew in order to share the salvation that is in Christ. The oneness of the body united to its Head in heaven was not brought out by this event; but it prepared the way for the promulgation of that truth, since in fact the Gentile was admitted on earth without becoming a Jew. The thing was done on earth individually, although the doctrine itself was not taught. Repentance unto life eternal was granted to the Gentiles as such. The Holy Ghost — the seal of christian blessing among the Jews, the fruit of redemption accomplished by Jesus — was given to Gentiles as to Jews. The latter might be astonished at it; but there was no resisting God. Through grace they could praise Him for it.

From chapter 9:32 to 11:18, we find then, the power of the Spirit of God with Peter in the midst of Israel, and the admission of Gentiles into the earthly assembly, without their becoming Jews, or submitting to the ancient order which was passing away; the seal of the Spirit put upon them; and the heads of the assembly at Jerusalem, and the most ardent of the circumcision, accepting the fact as the will of God, and praising Him while submitting to it, in spite of their prejudices. The door then is open to the Gentile. This was an immense step. The precious doctrine of the assembly had yet to be announced.

Peter had proclaimed the call of the Gentiles in his first discourse; but to realise it, and give form to its conditions, in connection with that which had already existed historically, required the intervention, the authority, and the revelation of God. Progress is evident through the patient grace of God; for it was not the wisdom of man. Altogether Jewish at the commencement, the people of Jerusalem were taught that Jesus would return if they repented. This testimony of grace is rejected, and, in the person of him who maintained it, the firstfruits of the assembly go up to heaven. The Holy Ghost, in His sovereign liberty, acts in Samaria and among the proselytes. The assembly being scattered by the persecution, Saul is brought in by the revelation of a glorious Christ, and by a testimony from His mouth which implies the union of saints on earth with Himself their Head in heaven as only one body. After this a pious Gentile, converted but still a Gentile, receives faith in Christ and the Holy Ghost; so that, marked out by this testimony — this seal from God Himself to his faith — the apostle and the disciples who were the most attached to Judaism receive him; Peter by baptising him, and the others by accepting Peter's act.

Let us notice here, that salvation is not only the fact of being quickened and pious, but that of complete deliverance so as to present us to Himself in righteousness, which God grants to every one who has life through the operation of God. Cornelius was pious and earnestly so; but he hears words of a work done for him whereby he may be, and (as we know) was saved. Finally the seal of the Holy Ghost, upon believing in Jesus,\* is the ground on which those whom God accepts are acknowledged. That is to say, it is the full evidence for man.

[\* If we examine closely the scriptures in its statements and facts, we shall find, I think, as to detail, that it is faith in the work of Jesus for the remission of sins which is sealed.]

**CHAPTER 11:**19 begins the narration of the new order of things by which the ministry of Paul is distinguished. Among those who were scattered abroad on the occasion of Stephen's death, and who went as far even as Antioch preaching the Lord Jesus, there were some who, being men of Cyprus and Cyrene, were more habitually connected with Greeks. They addressed the Greeks therefore in this ancient capital of the Seleucidae, and many received their word and turned to the Lord. The assembly at Jerusalem, already prepared through the conversion of Cornelius, by which God had shown them the entering in of the Gentiles, accept this event also and send Barnabas — himself a man of Cyprus — to Antioch. A good man and filled with the Holy Ghost, his heart is full of joy on seeing this work of the grace of God; and much people is added unto the Lord.

As yet all is linked with the work at Jerusalem, although extending now to the Gentiles. Barnabas, apparently no longer sufficient for the work and at all events led of God, departs in search of Saul, who had gone to Tarsus, when they sought to kill him at Jerusalem. And these two meet with the assembly at Antioch, teaching much people. Still everything takes place in connection with Jerusalem, whence some prophets come down and announce a famine. The links between the flock and Jerusalem as a center are shown and strengthened, by the sending of relief to that religious metropolis of Judaism, and of Christianity looked at as having its commencement in the Jewish remnant who believed in Jesus as the Christ.

Barnabas and Saul are themselves charged with this service, and go up to Jerusalem to accomplish it. This circumstance carries us back to Jerusalem, where the Spirit has still something to show us of the ways of God.

**CHAPTER 12.** Herod, to please the Jews, begins to persecute the assembly in that city. We may remark here, that the company of believers at Antioch are also called the assembly (church), which is the case nowhere else as yet. All were accounted as forming a part integrally of the work at Jerusalem,\* even as all Jews were in connection with that center of their religious system, however numerous their synagogues or great the influence of their rabbis. Every Jew, as such, sprang from Jerusalem. Barnabas and Saul assemble with the church or assembly at Antioch. A

local assembly, conscious of its existence — distinct from, while connected with, Jerusalem — has been formed; and assemblies without a metropolis begin to appear.

[\* There is a question of the reading in chapter 9:31, which does not however affect the general thought, that a local assembly, distinct from Jerusalem, composed primarily of Gentiles, was now formed.]

To return to Jerusalem. Herod, an impious king, and in certain respects a type of the adversary-king at the end, begins to persecute the faithful remnant at Jerusalem. It is not only the Jews who are opposed to them. The king — whom, as Jews, they detested — unites himself to them by his hatred to the heavenly testimony, thinking to win their favor by this means. He kills James, and proceeds to take Peter and put him in prison. But God preserves His servant, and delivers him by His angel in answer to the prayers of the saints. He allows some to be slain (happy witnesses to their heavenly portion in Christ), and preserves others to carry on the testimony on earth, in spite of all the power, apparently irresistible, of the enemy — a power which the Lord baffles by the manifestation of that which belongs to Him and to Him alone, and which He employs when He will and how He will. The poor saints, although praying fervently (they had prayer-meetings in those days), can hardly believe, when Peter comes to the door, that God had really granted their prayer. The desire presents itself sincerely to God; faith can scarcely reckon upon Him.

Herod, confounded by the power of Him whom he resisted, condemns the instruments of his hatred to death, and goes away to the Gentile seat of his authority. There displaying his glory, and accepting the adulatory homage of the people, as though he were a God, God Himself smites him, and shows that He is the governor of this world, however great the pride of man. But the word of God extends through His grace; and Barnabas and Saul, having fulfilled their ministry, return to Antioch, taking with them John whose surname was Mark.

**CHAPTER 13.** We come now to the beginning of the direct history of the work, new in some important respects, that is, connected with Paul's mission by the immediate intervention of the Holy Ghost. It is not now Christ upon earth, who by His personal authority sends forth the twelve, afterwards endowed with the power of the Holy Ghost from on high to announce His exaltation to heaven and His return, and to gather under the



standard of the cross those who should believe in Him. Paul has seen Christ in glory, and therefore has united himself to the assembly already gathered. But here there is no Christ personally present to send him forth as the witness of His presence on earth, or of His rejection as One whom Paul had known in earth. The Holy Ghost Himself sends him, not from Jerusalem, but from a Greek city, in which in free and sovereign power He had converted and gathered together some Gentiles, doubtless some Jews likewise, but forming an assembly whose existence was first marked by the fact that the gospel had been preached to the Greeks.

In **CHAPTER 13** we find ourselves again in the assembly at Antioch, and in the midst of the independent\* action of the Spirit of God. Certain prophets are there, Saul among them. They fasted and were occupied with the service of the Lord. The Holy Ghost commands them to separate unto Him Barnabas and Saul for the work to which He had called them. Such was the source of the ministry of these two. Assuredly it bore testimony to Him in whom they had believed, and whom Saul, at least, had seen, and it was under His authority they acted; but the positive and obvious source of their mission was the Holy Ghost. It was the Holy Ghost who called them to the work. They were sent forth (v. 4) by Him — an all-important principle as to the Lord's ways upon earth. We come out from Jerusalem, from Judaism, from the jurisdiction of the apostles nominated by the Lord while He was on earth. Christ is no longer known after the flesh, as Saul (when become Paul) expresses it. They have to strive against the Judaic spirit — to show consideration for it as far as it is sincere; but the sources of their work are not now in connection with the system which that work no longer knows as a starting-point. A glorious Christ in heaven, who owns the disciples as members of His body as Himself on high — a mission from the Holy Ghost on earth which only knows His energy as the source of action and authority (bearing testimony of course to Christ) this is the work which now opens, and which is committed to Barnabas and Saul. Barnabas, it is true, forms a link between the two. He was himself a Hellenist of Cyprus; it was he who presented Saul to the apostles after his conversion near Damascus. Barnabas had more largeness of heart — was more open to the testimonies of divine grace — than even the apostles and the others who had been nurtured in a strict Judaism; for God in His grace provides for everything. There is always a Barnabas, as

well as a Nicodemus, a Joseph, and even a Gamaliel, whenever needed. The actings of God in this respect are remarkable in all this history. Would that we only trusted more entirely, while by the Spirit doing His will, to Him who disposes all things!

[\* The acting of the Spirit is always independent; but here I mean to express that it was outside the authority of the apostles. This authority is not the source of that which is done; nor does that which is done refer itself to it.]

Nevertheless even this link is soon broken. It was still in connection with the “old cloth,” the “old bottles”; blessed as the man himself was, to whom the Holy Ghost rendered so fine a testimony, and in whom we see an exquisite character. He determined to take his kinsman also (see Colossians 4:10), Mark. Mark returns to Jerusalem almost from the beginning of the work of evangelisation in the Gentile regions; and Saul continues his work with such instruments as God formed under his hand, or a Silas who chose to remain at Antioch when (the particular service which had been committed to him at Jerusalem being ended) he might naturally have returned thither with Judas.

Sent forth thus by the Holy Ghost, Barnabas and Saul, with John Mark as their ministering servant, go away to Seleucia, then to Cyprus; and being at Salamis, a town in that island, they preach the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. Whatever therefore might be the energy of the Holy Ghost, He acts in connection with the counsels and the promises of God, and that with perfect patience. To the end of his life, notwithstanding the opposition of the Jews, vexatious and implacable as it might be, the apostle continues — as the ways and counsels of God in Christ had commanded — to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles. Once brought in where truth and grace were fully revealed in God’s assembly, there was no difference between Jew and Gentile. God is one in His character and fully revealed, and the veil rent; sin is one in its character and is opposed to God; the foundation of truth changes not, and the oneness of the assembly is connected with the height of grace in God and comes down to the deep totality of sin, in respect of which that grace has displayed itself. But, with regard to the ways of God upon earth, the Jews had the first place, and the Spirit, who is above all, can therefore act in full liberty in recognising all the ways of God’s sovereignty; even as Christ, who made Himself a servant in grace, submitted to them all, and now, being exalted on

high, unites all these various ways and dispensations in Himself as head and center of a glory to which the Holy Ghost bears witness, in order to accomplish it here below, as far as may be, by grace.

This does not prevent his giving a distinct and positive judgment as to the condition of the Jews when the occasion requires it.

Even here, at the commencement of his ministry, the two things are presented together. We have already noticed that he begins with the Jews. Having traversed the island, he arrives at the seat of government. There the proconsul, a prudent and thoughtful man, asks to hear the gospel. Beset already by a false prophet (who took advantage of the felt need of a soul which, while ignorant, was earnestly desirous of something that could fill up the void it experienced in the nothingness of pagan ceremonies, and in its disgusting immorality), he sends for Barnabas and Saul. Elymas withstands them. This was natural. He would lose his influence with the governor if the latter received the truth that Paul preached. Now Elymas was a Jew. Saul (who is henceforth named Paul) filled with the Holy Ghost, pronounces on him the sentence, on God's part, of temporary blindness, executed at the moment by the mighty hand of God. The proconsul, struck with the power that accompanied his word, submits to the gospel of God.

I do not doubt that in this wretched Bar-Jesus we see a picture of the Jews at the present time, smitten with blindness for a season, because jealous of the influence of the gospel. In order to fill up the measure of their iniquity, they withstood its being preached to the Gentiles. Their condition is judged: their history given in the mission of Paul.\* Opposed to grace, and seeking to destroy its effect upon the Gentiles, they have been smitten with blindness — nevertheless only for a season.

[\* I do not know if the change of name pointed out on this occasion — the meaning of which has excited the curiosity of etymologists is not simply an alteration by which its Jewish form was lost, in order to assume a Roman or Gentile aspect.]

Departing from Paphos, they go into Asia Minor; and now Paul definitively takes his place in the eyes of the historian of the Spirit. His whole company are only those who were with Paul, an expression in Greek which makes Paul everything (Paul's company Lit. "those around

Paul"). When they reached Perga, John Mark leaves them to return to Jerusalem — a milder and more moderate form of the Judaic influence, but showing that, wherever it exercised itself, if it did not produce opposition, it at least took away the vigor needful for the work of God as it was now unfolding among the Gentiles. Barnabas however goes farther, and still continues with Paul in the work. The latter, when they were come to Antioch,\* again begins first with the Jews. He goes on the sabbath day into the synagogue, and, on the invitation of the ruler, proclaims Jesus, rejected by the Jews at Jerusalem and crucified, but by the power of God raised up again, and through whom they might be justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. Here the testimony of Paul is very like that of Peter, and is very particularly allied to the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews, with regard to the character of the testimony: verse 33 is quite Peter's testimony in Acts 3. In verse 31 he sets the twelve distinctly in the place of testimony to Israel, as those who had personally accompanied the Lord, and who had seen Him after His resurrection. "They are," he says, "his witnesses unto the people." But Paul's testimony (which, as to the fulfillment of the promises by the coming of Christ, and the mercies of David made sure in His resurrection, returns into the order of Peter's preaching) departs from it in an important point. He says nothing of God's having made Jesus both Lord and Christ. He announces that the remission of sins is proclaimed in His name, exhorting his hearers not to neglect this great salvation.\*\*

[\* In Pisidia.]

[\*\* Both, as we have seen, follow (in the main) the commission in Luke 24.]

Many follow Paul\* and Barnabas in consequence of this announcement, and are exhorted by them to continue in the grace which had been proclaimed to them. The mass of the people come together the following sabbath to hear the word of God; the Gentiles having besought that this gospel of grace might be preached to them again. Their souls had found more truth in the doctrine of the one only God, acknowledged by the Jews, than in the senseless worship of the Pagans, which, to an awakened and unsatisfied mind, no longer presented any food that could appease it — a mind that was too active to allow the imagination to amuse itself with ceremonies which had no charms but for ignorance, which could be captivated by the pageantry of festivals, to which it was accustomed, and

which gratified the religious element of the flesh. Still, the coldly acknowledged doctrine of one only true God, although it set the mind free from all that shocked it in the senseless and immoral mythology of Paganism, did not at all feed the soul as did the powerful testimony of a God acting in grace, born by the Holy Ghost through the mouth of messengers whom He had sent — a testimony which, while faithful to the promises made to the Jews, yet addressed itself as a “word of salvation” (v. 26) to all those who feared God. But the Jews, jealous of the effect of the gospel which thus met the soul’s need in a way that their system could not, withstand Paul and blaspheme the doctrine of Christ. Paul therefore and Barnabas turn boldly to the Gentiles.

[\* Here Paul is placed before Barnabas; in the former chapter, Barnabas has the first place.]

It was a decisive and important moment. These two messengers of the Holy Ghost quote the testimony of the Old Testament with regard to God’s purpose towards the Gentiles, of whom Christ was to be the light — a purpose which they accomplished according to the intelligence in it that the Spirit gave them, and by His power. The passage is in Isaiah (chap. 49), where the opposition of Israel, that made the testimony of Christ useless to themselves, gave God occasion to declare that this work was but a small thing, and that Christ should be a light to the Gentiles, and great even to the ends of the earth.

We shall do well to observe this last circumstance, the energy in action imparted by spiritual intelligence, and the way in which prophetic declarations turn into light and authority for action, when the Spirit of God gives the true practical meaning — the application. Another might not perhaps understand it; but the spiritual man has a full guarantee for his own conscience in the word which he has understood. He leaves the rest to God.

The Gentiles rejoice at the testimony, and the election believe. The word spreads through all the region. The Jews now show themselves in their true character of enemies to the Lord and to His truth. With regard to them Paul and Barnabas shake off the dust of their feet against them. The disciples, whatever might be their difficulties, are no hindrance to this. The position here taken by the Jews — which, moreover, we find everywhere

— makes us understand what a source of grief and pain they must have been to the apostles.

**CHAPTER 14.** Their missionary labors continue in Iconium with the same opposition from the Jews who, incapable themselves of the work, stir up the Gentiles against those who are performing it. As long as it was only opposition, it was but a motive for perseverance; but, being warned in time of an assault that was planned against them, they depart to Lystra and Derbe. There, having healed a cripple, they excite the idolatrous respect of these poor pagans; but, filled with horror, they turn them from their error by the energy of the Holy Ghost — faithful to the testimony of their God. Hither also the Jews follow them. Now, if man will not ally himself with the idolatry of the heart, and accept exaltation from men, the power of his testimony, which they began by admiring as long as they thought they could elevate man and acquire importance through their flatteries being accepted, ends by exciting the hatred of their hearts. The Jews bring this hatred into action and stir up the people, who leave Paul for dead. But he rises up and re-enters the city, remaining tranquilly there another day, and on the morrow he goes with Barnabas to Derbe.

Afterwards they revisit the cities through which they had passed, and at Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, they confirm the disciples in the faith, and teach them that they must pass through tribulation to inherit the kingdom. They choose elders for them; and passing through some other cities to the place where they had disembarked, they return to Antioch, from whence they had been commended to God for the work, causing great joy to the disciples there in that the door of faith was opened to the Gentiles. This is the first formal mission among the Gentiles where assemblies are formed, elders appointed by the apostles, and the hostility of the Jews to the grace of God, outside their nation and independently of their law, is distinctly marked. The word assumes a positive character among the Gentiles, and the energy of the Holy Ghost displays itself to this end, constituting and forming them into assemblies, establishing local rulers in them, outside and independently of the action of the apostles and assembly at Jerusalem, and the obligation of the law which was still maintained there.

A question concerning this (that is, whether it could be allowed) is soon raised at Antioch. It is no longer the opposition of the Jews hostile to the

gospel, but the bigotry of those who had embraced it, desiring to impose the law on the converted Gentiles. But the grace of God provides for this difficulty also.

**CHAPTER 15** contains the account of this. Certain persons come from Jerusalem, where all was still going on in connection with the requirements of the law; and they seek to impose these requirements on the Gentiles in this new center and starting-point of the work which was formed at Antioch. It was the will of God that this matter should be settled, not by the apostolic authority of Paul, or by the action of His Spirit at Antioch only, which might have divided the church, but by means of conference at Jerusalem, so as to maintain union, whatever might be the prejudices of the Jews. The ways of God in this respect are remarkable, showing the way in which He has maintained sovereign care in grace over the church. In reading the Epistle to the Galatians, we see that in reality things were in question that touched Christianity to the quick, that affected its very foundations, the deep principles of grace, of the rights of God, of the sinful condition of man — principles on which the whole edifice of man's eternal relations with God is founded. If any one was circumcised, he was under the law; he had given up grace, he had fallen away from Christ. Nevertheless Paul the apostle, Paul full of faith, of energy, of burning zeal, is obliged to go up to Jerusalem, whither he had not desired to go, in order to arrange this matter. Paul had labored at Antioch; but the work in that city was not his work. He was not the apostle at Antioch as he was that of Iconium, of Lystra, and afterwards of Macedonia and of Greece. He went out from Antioch, from the bosom of the church already formed there. The question was to be settled for the church, apart from the apostolic authority of Paul. The apostle must yield before God and His ways.

Paul disputes with the men from Judea, but the end is not gained. It is determined to send some members of the church to Jerusalem, but with them Paul and Barnabas, so deeply interested in this question. Moreover Paul had a revelation that he should go up. God directed his steps. It is good however to be obliged to submit sometimes, although ever so right or so full of spiritual energy.

The question then is entered upon at Jerusalem. It was already a great thing that the subjecting of the Gentiles to the law should be resisted at

Jerusalem, and still more that they should there decide not to do it. We see the wisdom of God in so ordering it, that such a resolution should have its origin at Jerusalem. Had there been no bigotry there, the question would not have been necessary; but alas! good has to be done in despite of all the weakness and all the traditions of men. A resolution made at Antioch would have been a very different thing from a resolution made at Jerusalem. The Jewish church would not have acknowledged the truth, the apostolic authority of the twelve would not have given its sanction to it. The course at Antioch and of the Gentiles would have been a course apart; and a continual struggle would have commenced, having (at least in appearance) the authority of the primitive and apostolic church on the one side, and the energy and liberty of the Spirit with Paul for its representative on the other. The Judaizing tendency of human nature is ever ready to abandon the high energy of the Spirit, and return into the ways and thoughts of the flesh. This tendency, nourished by the traditions of an ancient faith, had already given sorrow and difficulty enough to him who was specially laboring among the Gentiles according to the liberty of the Spirit, without the additional strength of having the course of the apostles and of the church at Jerusalem to countenance it.

After much discussion at Jerusalem, full liberty for which was given, Peter, taking the lead, relates the case of Cornelius. Afterwards Paul and Barnabas declare the wonderful manifestation of God through the power of the Holy Ghost which had taken place among the Gentiles. James then sums up the judgment of the assembly, which is assented to by all, that the Gentiles shall not be obliged to be circumcised, or to obey the law; but only to abstain from blood, from things strangled, from fornication, and from meat offered to idols. We shall do well to consider the nature and stipulations of this decree.

It is a direction which teaches, not that which is abstractedly good or evil, but that which was suitable to the case presented. It was “necessary,” not “righteous before God,” to avoid certain things. The things might be really evil, but they are not here looked at in that way. There were certain things to which the Gentiles were accustomed, which it was proper they should renounce, in order that the assembly might walk as it ought before God in peace. To the other ordinances of the law they were not to be subjected. Moses had those who preached him. That sufficed, without compelling the



Gentiles to submit to his laws, when they joined themselves, not to the Jews, but to the Lord.

This decree therefore does not pronounce upon the nature of the things forbidden, but upon the opportuneness — the Gentiles having in fact been in the habit of doing all these things. We must observe that they were not things forbidden by the law only. It was that which was contrary to the order established by God as Creator, or to a prohibition given to Noah when he was told to eat flesh. Woman was only to be connected with man in the sanctity of marriage, and this is a very great blessing. Life belonged to God. All fellowship with idols was an outrage against the authority of the true God. Let Moses teach his own laws; these things were contrary to the intelligent knowledge of the true God. It is not therefore a new law imposed by Christianity, nor an accommodation to the prejudices of the Jews. It has not the same kind of validity as a moral ordinance that is obligatory in itself. It is the expression to christian intelligence of the terms of man's true relations with God in the things of nature, given by the goodness of God, through the leaders at Jerusalem, to ignorant Christians, setting them free from the law, and enlightening them with regard to the relations between God and man, and to that which was proper to man — things of which, as idolatrous Gentiles, they had been ignorant. I have said, addressed to christian intelligence: accordingly there is nothing inconsistent in eating anything that is sold at the shambles; for I acknowledge God who gave it, and not an idol. But if the act implies communion with the idol, even to the conscience of another, it would be provoking God to jealousy; I sin against Him or against my neighbor. I do not know whether an animal is strangled or not, but if people act so as to imply that it is indifferent whether life belongs to God or not, I sin again; I am not defiled by the thing, but I fail in christian intelligence with regard to the rights of God as Creator. With regard to fornication, this enters into the category of christian purity, besides being contrary to the order of the Creator; so that it is a direct question of good and evil, and not only of the rights of God revealed to our intelligence. This was important as a general principle, more than in the detail of the things themselves.

In sum the principles established are these: purity by marriage according to God's original institution; that life belongs to God; and the unity of God as one only true God — Godhead, life, and God's original ordinance for man.

The same thing is true of the foundations laid by the assembly at the basis of their decree, "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us."

The Holy Ghost had manifested Himself in the case of Cornelius and of the conversion of the Gentiles, of which Peter and Paul and Barnabas had given the account. On the other hand the apostles were the depositaries of the authority of Christ, those to whom the government of the assembly as founded in connection with the true Jewish faith had been committed. They represented the authority of Christ ascended on high, even as the power and will of the Holy Ghost had been shown in the cases I have just mentioned. The authority was exercised in connection with that which, in a certain sense, was the continuation of a Judaism enlarged by fresh revelations, and which had its center at Jerusalem, acknowledging as Messiah the ascended Jesus rejected by the people. Christ had committed to them the authority necessary to govern the assembly. They had also been sealed on the day of Pentecost in order to perform it.

The spirit of grace and wisdom is truly seen in their way of acting. They give their full sanction to Paul and Barnabas, and they send with them persons of note in the assembly at Jerusalem, who could not be suspected of bringing an answer in support of their own pretensions, as might have been supposed in the case of Paul and Barnabas.

The apostles and elders assemble for deliberation; but the whole flock acts in concert with them.

Thus Jerusalem has decided that the law was not binding on the Gentiles. These, sincere in their desire of walking with Christ, rejoice greatly at their freedom from this yoke. Judas and Silas, being prophets, exhort and confirm them, and afterwards are dismissed in peace. But Silas thinks it good to remain on his own account, influenced by the Spirit. He prefers the work among the Gentiles to Jerusalem. Judas returns from it to Jerusalem.

The work continues at Antioch by means of Paul and Barnabas and others. At Antioch we again see the full liberty of the Holy Ghost.

Paul proposes to Barnabas that they should go and visit the assemblies already formed by their means in Asia Minor. Barnabas consents, but he determines to take John who had formerly forsaken them. Paul wishes for

some one who had not drawn back from the work, nor abandoned for his own home the place of a stranger for the work's sake. Barnabas insists; and these two precious servants of God separate. Barnabas takes Mark and goes to Cyprus. Now Mark was his kinsman, and Cyprus his own country. Paul takes Silas, who had preferred the work to Jerusalem instead of Jerusalem to the work and departs. From his name we may believe that Silas was a Hellenist.

It is happy to find that, after this, Paul speaks of Barnabas with entire affection, and desires that Mark should come to him, having found him profitable for the ministry.

Moreover Paul is commended by the brethren to the grace of God in his work. The title given to Paul and Barnabas by the apostles shows the difference between the apostolic authority, established by Christ in person, and that which was constituted such by the power of the Holy Ghost — sent by Christ Himself, no doubt, but in point of fact going forth by the direction of the Holy Ghost, and their mission warranted by His power. With the apostles, Paul and Barnabas have no title except their work — "men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." They are that which the Holy Ghost has made them. The apostles are the twelve.

The liberty and the power of the Spirit characterise Paul. He is that which the Spirit makes him. If Jesus had appeared to him, although Ananias can testify it, he must in reality prove it by the power of his ministry. The effects of this ministry are related as well as its character in chapters 16-20. The action and the liberty of the Holy Ghost are there displayed in a remarkable manner.

There is perhaps no example of this more remarkable than that which Paul does with regard to Timothy. He uses circumcision in all liberty to set aside Jewish prejudice. It is very doubtful whether, according to the law, he ought to have been circumcised. Ezra and Nehemiah show us the strange wives sent away; but here, the mother being a Jewess, Paul causes the child of this mixed marriage to follow the rule of the Jews and submit to that rite. Liberty fully recognises the law in its place, although itself exempt from it, and distinctly states, for the assurance of the Gentiles, the absence of all pretension, on the part of the Judæan Christians, to impose

the law upon Gentiles. Paul circumcises Timothy, and does not give subjection for an hour to those who would have compelled Titus to be circumcised. He would become a Jew to the Jews from love; but the Jews themselves must renounce all pretension to impose the law on others. The decrees given at Jerusalem are left with the churches — a plain answer to every Jew who desired to subject the Gentiles to Judaism. The decrees, we may remark, were those of the apostles and the elders.

It is the Holy Ghost alone who directs the apostle. He forbids him to preach in Asia (the province), and will not suffer him to go into Bithynia. By a vision in the night they are called to go into Macedonia. Here the historian meets them. It is the Lord who calls them into Macedonia. It is well to note here that, while the gospel is sent under Paul's ministry to the whole creation under heaven, yet there is specific direction as to where we are to go.

Here the apostle goes first to the Jews, even when it was only a few women who came together by the river side — a place, as it appears, usually chosen where there was no synagogue. A Greek woman, who worshipped the God of Israel, is converted by grace. Thus the door is opened, and others also believe (v. 40). Here Satan tries to tamper with the work by bearing a testimony to the ministers of the word. Not that this spirit acknowledged Jesus — he would not then have been an evil spirit, he would not have thus possessed the damsel. He speaks of the agents, in order to have a share of the glory, and of the most high God — compelled perhaps by the presence of the Spirit to speak, as had been the case with others by the presence of Jesus, when His power was before their eyes. The testimony of Satan could not go so far as to own Him Lord; and if Paul had not been faithful, it would have mixed up the work of the enemy with that of the Lord. But it was not a testimony to Paul that Paul sought, nor a testimony rendered by an evil spirit, whatever might be the appearance of its testimony. The proof which the evil spirit had to give that the power of God was present, was to submit to it by being driven away. It could not be a support to the work of God. We see in this circumstance the disinterestedness of the apostle, his spiritual discernment, the power of God with him, and the faith which will have no other support than that of God. It would have been useful to have a testimony rendered to his ministry: the reasonings of the flesh might have

said, 'I did not seek it.' Persecution would have been avoided. But God will have no other testimony than that which He bears to Himself. No other can be a testimony from Him, for He reveals Himself where He is not known; faith waits only on Him to render it. Paul went on without troubling himself about this malicious attempt of the enemy's, and possibly in wisdom avoiding conflict where there was no fruit for the Lord, until by its persistency the apostle was forced to attend to it. The Spirit of God does not tolerate the presence of an evil spirit when it makes itself actively manifest before Him. He does not lend Himself to its devices by giving it importance through a voluntary interposition; for He has His own work, and He does not turn away from it to occupy Himself about the enemy. He is occupied, in love, about souls. But if Satan comes in His way, so as to perplex these souls, the Spirit reveals Himself in His energy, and the enemy flees before Him.

But Satan is not without resources. The power which he cannot exercise in a direct way, he employs in exciting the passions and lusts of men in opposition to that power against which he cannot himself stand, and which will neither unite itself to him nor recognise him. Even as the Gadarenes desired Jesus to depart, when He had healed Legion, so the Philippians rise up tumultuously against Paul and his companions at the instigation of the men who had lost their dishonest gains. But God makes use of all this to direct the progress of His own work, and give it the form He pleases. There is the gaoler to be converted, and the magistrates themselves are to confess their wrong with respect to the messengers of God. The assembly is gathered out, a flock (as the epistle addressed to them bears witness) full of love and affection. The apostle goes to labor elsewhere. We see a more active, a more energetic, testimony here than in the similar case that happened to Peter. The intervention of God is more striking in Peter's case. It is the old Jerusalem, worn out in everything except hatred, and God faithful to the one who trusted in Him. The hatred is disappointed. Paul and Silas sing, instead of quietly sleeping; the doors burst suddenly open; and the gaoler himself is converted, and his family. The magistrates are obliged to come as supplicants to Paul. Such is the result of the tumult. The enemy was mistaken here. If he stopped their work at Philippi, he sent the apostles to preach elsewhere according to the will of God.

We must not pass over in silence this energy which embraced whole houses, and subdued them to the christian faith. We only see it, however, when it is a question of bringing in the Gentiles.\* But Cornelius, Lydia, the gaoler of Philippi, are all witnesses to this power.

[\* We see however, in the case of Lydda and Saron, what is more analogous to the introduction of a people. They heard of the miracle done to Aeneas; and the town and neighborhood turned to the Lord. Saron is a district along the coast.]

In the last case it was the power exercised by the enemy over the passions of the Gentiles that caused the persecution of the apostles: at Thessalonica we again find the old and universal enmity of the Jews. Nevertheless many Jews and proselytes received the gospel. After a tumult there also, the apostles go away to Berea. There the Jews are more noble; what they hear, they examine by the word of God. Through this a great number among them believed. Nevertheless the Jews of Thessalonica, jealous of the progress the gospel made, go over to Berea. Paul leaves the city and passes on to Athens. Silas and Timothy remain for the moment at Berea, Paul being the special object of the Jews' pursuit. At Athens, although he resorted to the synagogue, yet, his spirit stirred at the sight of the universal idolatry in that idle city, he disputes daily in public with their philosophers; consequent on these interviews, he proclaims the true God to the chief men of that intellectual capital. He had sent word to Silas and Timothy to join him there.

With a people like the Athenians — such is the effect of intellectual cultivation without God — he has to come down to the lowest step in the ladder of truth. He sets forth the oneness of God, the Creator, and the relationship of man to Him, declaring also that Jesus will judge the world, of which God had given proof by raising Him up from the dead. With the exception of the judgment of this world being put in place of the promises respecting the return of Jesus, we might think it was Peter addressing the Jews. We must not imagine that the historian relates everything that Paul said. What is given is his defence, not his preaching. The Holy Ghost gives us that which characterised the manner in which the apostle met the circumstances of those he addressed. That which remained on the minds of his first hearers was that he preached Jesus and the resurrection. It appears even that some took the resurrection, as well as Jesus, to be a God. It is,

indeed, the basis of Christianity, which is founded on Jesus personally, and the fact of His resurrection; but it is only the basis.

I have said that we are reminded here of Peter's preaching. I mean as to the degree of height in his doctrine with regard to Christ. We shall observe, at the same time, the appropriateness of the application of facts in either case to the persons addressed. Peter set forth the rejected Christ ascended on high, ready to return on the repentance of the Jews, and who would establish at His coming all things of which the prophets had spoken. Here the judgment of the world — sanction of the truth to the natural conscience — is presented to the learned men, and to the inquisitive people; nothing that could interest their philosophic minds, but a plain and convincing testimony to the folly of their idolatry, according even to that which the natural conscience of their own poets had acknowledged.

The dishonest gain, to which Satan ministered opportunity, met the gospel at Philippi; the hardness and moral indifference of knowledge that flattered human vanity, at Athens; at Thessalonica, the efforts of Jewish jealousy. The gospel goes on its way, victorious over the one, yielding to the effect of another, and, after laying bare to the learned Athenians all that their condition tolerated, leaving them, and finding, amid the luxury and the depraved manners of the wealthy city of Corinth, a numerous people to bring into the assembly. Such are the ways of God, and the exercises of His devoted servant led by the Holy Ghost.

We may notice, that this energy, which seeks the Gentiles, never loses sight of the favor of God towards His elect people — a favor that sought them until they rejected it.

At Thessalonica Paul twice received succor from Philippi; at Corinth, where money and commerce abounded, he does not take it, but quietly works with two of his countrymen of the same trade as himself. He again begins with the Jews, who oppose his doctrine and blaspheme. The apostle takes his course with the boldness and decision of a man truly led of God, calmly and wittingly, so as not to be turned aside. He shakes his garments in token of being pure of their blood, and declares that now he turns to the Gentiles according to Isaiah 49, taking that prophecy as a command from God.

In Corinth God has “much people.” He therefore uses the unbelieving indifference of Gallio to defeat the projects and malice of the Jews, jealous as ever of a religion that eclipsed their importance, whatever might be its grace towards them. Paul, after laboring there a long time, goes away in peace. His Jewish friends, Priscilla and Aquila, go with him. He was going himself to Jerusalem. He was also under a vow. The opposition of the Jews does not take away his attachment to his nation — his faithfulness in preaching the gospel to them first — in recognising everything that belonged to them in grace before God. He even submits to Jewish ordinances. Possibly habit had some influence over him, which was not of the Spirit; but according to the Spirit he had no thought of disallowing that which the patient grace of God granted to the people. He addresses himself to the Jews at Ephesus. They are inclined to hear him, but he desires to keep the feast at Jerusalem. Here he is still a Jew with his feasts and vows. The Spirit has evidently introduced these circumstances to give us a true and complete picture of the relationship that existed between the two systems — the degree of freedom from the influence of the one, as well as the energy that established the other. The first remains often to a certain degree, where energy to do the other is in a very high degree. The liberty that condescends to prejudices and habits is not the same thing as subjection to these prejudices in one’s own person. In our feebleness the two mingle together; but they are in fact opposed to each other. To respect that which God respects, even when the system has lost all real force and value, if called to act in connection with this system when it is really nothing more than a superstition and a weakness, is a very different thing from putting oneself under the yoke of superstition and weakness. The first is the effect of the Spirit; the last, of the flesh. In us, alas! the one is often confounded with the other. Charity becomes weakness, giving uncertainty to the testimony.

Paul takes his journey; goes up to Jerusalem, and salutes the assembly; goes down to Antioch, and visits again all the first assemblies he had formed, thus binding all his work together — Antioch and Jerusalem. How far his old habits influenced him in his ways of acting, I leave the reader to judge. He was a Jew. The Holy Ghost would have us see that he was as far as possible from any contempt for the ancient people of God, for whom divine favor will never change. This feeling was surely right. It appears



elsewhere that he went beyond the limits of the Spirit and of spirituality. Here we have only the facts. He may have had some private reason that was valid in consequence of the position in which he stood. One may be in circumstances which contradict the liberty of the Spirit, and which, nevertheless, when we are in them, have a certain right over us, or exercise an influence which necessarily weakens in the soul the energy of that liberty. We may have done wrong in putting ourselves into those circumstances, but, being in them, the influence is exercised, the rights assert their claim. A man called to serve God, driven out from his father's house, walks in the liberty of the Spirit. Without any change in his father, he goes into the paternal house: the rights of his father revive — where is his liberty? Or a man possessed of much clearer spiritual intelligence places himself in the midst of friends who are spiritually altogether below him: it is almost impossible for him to retain a spiritual judgment. However it may have been here, the link is now formed voluntarily on the part of him who stood in the place of liberty and grace, and the Christians in Jerusalem remain at the level of their former prejudices, and claim patience and indulgence from him who was the vessel and the witness of the liberty of the Spirit of God.

This, with the supplement of his work at Ephesus, forms the circle of the active labors of the apostle in the gospel, to show us in him the ways of the Spirit with men.

From verse 24 of chapter 18 to verse 7 of chapter 19 we have a kind of summary of the progress made by the doctrine of Christ, and of the power that accompanied it. Apollos knew only of the teaching of John; but, upright in heart, he publicly confessed and preached that which he knew. It was the faith of a regenerate soul. Aquila and Priscilla enlighten him fully with regard to the facts of the gospel, and the doctrine of a dead and glorified Christ. At Corinth he becomes a powerful teacher of the gospel, of the Lord among the Jews, thus confirming the faith of the disciples. The energy of the Holy Ghost manifests itself in him without any intervention of the apostle or of the twelve. He acts independently; that is, the Spirit acts independently in him. People could say, "I am of Apollos." It is interesting to see these different manifestations of the power and liberty of the Spirit, and to remember that the Lord is above all, and that, if He acts greatly by a Paul, He acts also in whom He will.

In that which follows we find, on another side, the progress of the divine revelation in union with Paul's apostolic power made very prominent by the capability of communicating the Holy Ghost. Twelve persons had believed, but with no other instruction than that of John: their baptism had been in reference to it. It was a Christ to come, and a Holy Ghost whom He would communicate, that they looked for. Now John's baptism required repentance, but in no way came out of the Jewish pale; although it opened a perspective of something different, according to the sovereignty of God, and as the effect of Christ's coming. But it was a baptism unto repentance for man on the earth, and not Christ's death and resurrection. Grace acted in a remnant, but of whom Jesus was a companion on earth. Now Christianity (for man's sin has been fully manifested) is founded on death and resurrection; first, that of Christ, thus accomplishing redemption, and then on our death and resurrection with Him so as to place us in Him and as Him before God in sinless life, life of His life, and washed in His blood from all our sins. But John's baptism, in fact, only taught repentance here below in order to receive Christ; Christianity taught the efficacy of the death and resurrection of a rejected Christ, in virtue of which the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete come down from heaven, should be received.

These twelve men (although John had announced that the baptism of the Holy Ghost should be the result of Christ's intervention) did not know whether there was yet any Holy Ghost\* a plain proof that they had not come into the house of God in which He dwelt. Paul explains this to them, and they are baptised in the name of Jesus. Paul, in his apostolic capacity, lays his hands on them; and they receive the Holy Ghost. They speak with tongues, and they prophesy.

[\* Literally whether the Holy Ghost was. The expression, which is the same as in John 7, is a very striking testimony to the distinctness and importance of the Holy Ghost's presence down here on earth. It is called "the Holy Ghost," though we all know He had ever been. But what is called the Holy Ghost, that is, His presence down here — this had never been.]

This power, and he who was its instrument, were now to be brought out into distinct relief. The capital city of Asia (that is, of the Roman province so named) is the theatre in which this was to be effected. We shall see a power displayed in this locality, which acts independently of all traditional forms, and which governs all that surrounds it, whether man,

conscience, or the enemy — an organising power, which forms of itself and for itself the institutions and the body that suit it, and which governs the whole position. The power of active grace has been displayed in the work of Paul, beginning with Antioch; and had shown itself in different ways. Here we have some details of its formal establishment in a great center.

During three months of patience he preaches Christ in the synagogue, and reasons with the Jews, conscious of divine strength and of the truth. He grants precedence, as the sphere of testimony, to that which had been the instrument and the people of God: “To the Jews first.” It is no longer said, “Salvation is of the Jews,” but it is preached to them first.

But this work having had its development, and many taking the place of adversaries, Paul acts as the founder of that which was according to God and on the part of God. He separates the disciples, and discourses upon Christianity in the hall of a Greek who had a public class. This went on for two years: so that the doctrine was spread through all the country among both the Jews and the Greeks. God did not fail to bear testimony to the word of His grace, and His power was displayed in a remarkable manner in connection with the person of the apostle who bore the testimony. The manifestations of the enemy’s power disappear before the action of this liberative power of the Lord, and the name of Jesus was glorified. Now the reality of this action was demonstrated in a striking way, that is, its source in the personal, positive, and real action of the Lord on the one side, and on the other, the mission of Paul, and faith as the instrument by which this supernatural power wrought. Certain Jews desired to avail themselves of it for their own self-interest; and devoid of faith, they use the name of “Jesus whom Paul preached” as though it had been a kind of charm. But the evil spirit, whose power was as true and real in its way as that of the Lord which he was forced to acknowledge when it was in exercise, knew very well that here it was not so, that there was neither faith nor power. “Jesus I know,” said he, “and who Paul is I know; but who are ye?” And the man who was possessed attacked and wounded them. Striking testimony to the action of the enemy, but at the same time to that superior force. to the reality of that intervention of God. which was carried into effect by means of Paul. Now, when God shows Himself, conscience always shows itself; and the power of the enemy over it is manifested and ceases. The Jews and

Greeks are filled with fear, and many who became Christians brought the proofs of their sorceries.

The mighty action of the Spirit showed itself by the decision it produced, by the immediate and unhesitating acting out of the thoughts and resolutions produced in the heart. There were no long inward arguments; the presence and the power of God produced their natural effects.

The enemy's resources were, however, not exhausted. The work of God was done, in the sense of the establishment of the testimony through apostolic labor; and God was sending His servant elsewhere. The enemy, as usual, excites a tumult, stirring up the passions of men against the instruments of the testimony of God. Paul had already intended to go away, but a little later; he had therefore sent Timothy and Erastus before him into Macedonia, purposing to visit Macedonia, Achaia, and Jerusalem, and afterwards to go to Rome; and he still remains some time in Asia. But after the departure of these two brethren, Demetrius excites the people against the Christians. Inveterate against the gospel, which shook the whole system in connection with which he made his fortune, and which was linked with all that gave him importance, this agent of the enemy knew how to act on the passions of the workmen who had the same occupation as himself; for he made little portable shrines to Diana, in silver. His employment was connected with that which all the world admired, with that which had possession of men's minds — a great comfort to man who feels the need of something sure — with that which had long given its hue to their religious habits. A great part of the influence exercised was, not "Great is Diana!" but "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" It was, in short, the power of the enemy among the Gentiles. The Jews apparently sought to avail themselves of this by putting one Alexander forward — the same possibly who had withstood Paul, and who they supposed would therefore be listened to by the people. But it was the evil spirit of idolatry that agitated them; and the Jews were foiled in their hope. Paul was prevented, both by the brethren and by some of the Asiarchs,\* from showing himself in the theatre. The assembly was dissolved by the town authorities; and Paul, when he had seen the disciples, went away in peace.\*\*

[\* Honorary magistrates from among the notables, who presided over the celebration of religious festivals.]

[\*\* It may perhaps interest the reader and help him to understand this part of the New Testament history, if I point out the time at which Paul wrote some of his epistles. He wrote the First to the Corinthians from Ephesus, and sent it by Titus. Timothy he sent by way of Macedonia. The latter might perhaps go into Greece; "If he come," the apostle says to the Corinthians. Then came the tumult, and just at this moment, or about the same time, his life was endangered; he did not even suppose that he should save it. He had purposed going by Greece into Macedonia, and then returning to Greece; but the state of Corinth prevented it, and he went first into Macedonia. On his way he goes to Troas, but does not stay there; in Macedonia he is much exercised in mind, and has no rest, because Titus had not brought him tidings of the Corinthians. There, however, Titus found him, and the apostle was comforted in his trouble by the good news of the return of the Corinthians to a right mind. Upon this he writes the second letter to them, and, after having visited the assemblies, he pursues his journey to Corinth, whence he wrote his epistle to the Romans. I only speak here of that which relates to this part of the apostle's history, and throws light upon his labors.]

His work there was finished, and the gospel planted in the capital of the province of Asia, and even in the whole province: Greece and Macedonia had already received it.

There was yet Rome. In what manner should he go thither? This is now the remaining question. His free and active life ended with the events which now occupy us, as far as it is given us by the Holy Ghost. A life blessed with an almost unequalled faith, with an energy that surpassed anything that has been seen in men, and which, through the divine power that wrought in it, produced its effects in spite of obstacles apparently insurmountable, in spite of every kind of opposition, in contempt and destitution, and which stamped its character on the assembly by giving it, instrumentally, its existence; and that, not only in spite of two hostile religions which divided the civilised world between them, but in spite of a religious system which possessed the truth, but which ever sought to confine it within the boundary of traditions that granted some place to the flesh — a system that had the plea of priority, and was sanctioned by the habits of those apostles who were nominated by the Lord Himself.

The assembly indeed, as Paul foresaw, soon returned to its Judaic ways, when the energy of the apostle was absent. It requires the power of the Holy Ghost to rise above the religiousness of the flesh. Piety does not necessarily do this; and power is never a tradition — it is itself, and thereby independent of men and of their traditions, even when bearing

with them in love. The flesh therefore always returns to the path of traditions and forms; because it is never power in the things of God, although it can recognise duty. It does not therefore rise to heaven; it does not understand grace; it can see what man ought to be for God (without however perceiving the consequences of this, if God is revealed), but it cannot see what God in His sovereign grace is for man. It will perhaps retain it as orthodoxy, where the Spirit has wrought; but it will never bring the soul into it. This it was, more than the violence of the pagans or the hatred of the Jews, which wrung the heart and caused the anguish of the faithful and blessed apostle, who by grace had a character, or rather a position, more like that of Christ than any other on earth.

These conflicts will be unfolded to us in the Epistles, as well as that ardent heart which — while embracing in its thoughts all the revealed counsels of God, and putting each part in its place, and embracing in its affections the whole of the work and of the assembly of God — could equally concentrate its whole energy of thought on a single important point, and of affection on a poor slave whom grace had given to him in his chains. The vessel of the Spirit, Paul shines with a heavenly light throughout the whole work of the gospel. He condescends at Jerusalem, thunders in Galatia when souls were being perverted, leads the apostles to decide for the liberty of the Gentiles, and uses all liberty himself to be as a Jew to the Jews, and as without law to those that had no law, as not under law, but always subject to Christ. Yet how difficult to maintain the height of life and of spiritual revelation, in the midst of so many opposing tendencies! He was also “void of offense.” Nothing within hindered his communion with God, whence he drew his strength to be faithful among men. He could say, and none but he, “Be ye imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” Thus also he could say, “I endure all things for the elect’s sake, that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory,” words which would not be improper in the Lord’s mouth — in a more exalted sense doubtless, because He endured for Paul himself the wrath that would have been his eternal condemnation — yet words which bring out the remarkable position of this man of God, as the vessel of the Holy Ghost by whom he was used. “I fill up,” said he, “that which is lacking\* of the sufferings of Christ for his body’s sake, which is the assembly; whereof I am made a minister to complete the word of God.

[\* The reader must distinguish between the Lord's sufferings for sin from God in righteousness, and those which He endured from sinful men for righteousness' sake. We partake in the latter, while Christ has saved us from the former, in which there is no question at all of participation, but of His substitution for us when we have deserved the condemnation due to sin.]

John (through his intimate knowledge of the Person of Christ, born on earth and Son of God) was able to maintain this essential and individually vital truth, in the same field in which Paul labored; but it was Paul's part to be the active instrument for propagating the truth which saves the soul, and brings ruined man into connection with God by faith, by communicating all His counsels of grace.

Still Paul was a man, although a man wonderfully blest. The intrinsic power of Judaism in connection with its relationship to the flesh is marvelous. As to the result indeed, if man takes his place below grace, that is, below God, it is better in a certain sense that he should be man under law than man without law. He will be the one or the other; but in taking up the exclusive idea of duty he forgets God as He is — for He is love; and too often forgets also man as he is — for he is sin. If he unites the idea of duty and of sin, it is continual bondage, and this is what Christianity in general is reduced to; with the addition of ordinances to ease the burdened conscience, of forms to create piety where communion is absent; clothing it all with the name of Christ, and with the authority of the church, so named, the very existence of which in its reality is identified with the principle of sovereign grace, and characterised by subjection.\*

[\* See Ephesians 5:24.]

But let us return to the history of Paul.

**CHAPTER 20.** After the uproar has ceased he sends for the disciples, embraces them, and departs for Macedonia; he visits that whole country, and comes into Greece. The beginning of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians gives the details of this part of his history. In Greece he remains three months; and when the Jews lay wait for him, he goes round by Macedonia, instead of sailing straight to Syria. At Troas (where a door had been opened to him on his way into Greece, but where his affection for the Corinthians had not allowed him to remain) he spends his Sunday, and even the whole week, in order to see the brethren. We perceive the usual object of their assembly: they “came together to break bread”; and

the ordinary occasion of holding it — "the first day of the week." Paul avails himself of this to speak to them all night; but it was an extraordinary occasion. The presence and the exhortations of an apostle failed in keeping them all awake. It was not however an assembly held in secret or in the dark. There were many lamps to light the upper chamber in which they met. By the place in which they came together we see that the assemblies were not composed of very many persons. The upper room in Jerusalem received, perhaps, one hundred and twenty. It appears by different salutations, that they met in private houses — probably in several, if the number of believers required it; but there was only one assembly.

Eutychus pays the penalty of his inattention; but God bears testimony to His own goodness, and to the power with which He had endued the apostle, by raising him from a state of death. Paul says that his soul was yet in him: he had only to renew the connection between it and his physical organism. In other cases the soul had been recalled.

Paul chose to go alone from Troas to Assos. We see all through the history, that he arranged, by the power that the Spirit gave him over them, the willing services of his companions — not, doubtless, as their master, yet more absolutely than if he had been so. He is (under Christ) the center of the system in which he labors, the center of energy. Christ alone can be by right the center of salvation and of faith. It was only as filled with the Spirit of God that Paul was the center even of that energy; and it was, as we have seen, by not grieving Him, and by exercising himself to have a conscience void of offense both towards God and towards men.

Paul does not stop at Ephesus, because in so central a place he must have stayed some time. It is necessary to avoid that which has a certain moral claim upon us, if we would not and ought not to be detained by the obligation it imposes upon us.

It was no want of affection for the beloved Ephesians, nor any thought of neglecting them. He sends for the elders, and addresses a discourse to them, which we must examine a little, as setting before us the position of the assembly at that time, and the work of the gospel among the nations.

The assemblies were consolidated over a pretty large extent of country, and in divers places at least had taken the form of a regularly ordered



institution. Elders were established and recognised. The apostle could send for them to come to him. His authority also was acknowledged on their part. He speaks of his ministry as a past thing — solemn thought! but he takes them to witness not only that he had preached the truth to them, but a truth that spoke to their conscience; setting them before God on the one hand, and on the other presenting to them Him in whom God made Himself known, and in whom He communicated all the fullness of grace on their behalf — Jesus, the object of their faith, the Savior of their souls. He had done this through trouble and through difficulty, in face of the unprincipled opposition of the Jews who had rejected the Anointed One, but in accordance with the grace that rose above all this evil and declared salvation to the Jews, and going beyond these limits (because it was grace) addressed itself to the Gentiles, to all men, as sinners and responsible to God. Paul had done this, not with the pride of a teacher, but with the humility and the perseverance of love. He desired also to finish his ministry, and to fail in nothing that Jesus had committed to him. And now he was going to Jerusalem, feeling bound in spirit to do so, not knowing what would befall him, but warned by the Holy Ghost that bonds and afflictions awaited him. With regard to themselves, he knew his ministry was ended, and that he should see their face no more. Henceforth responsibility would specially rest upon them.

Thus what the Holy Ghost here sets before us is, that now, when the detail of his work among the Gentiles to plant the gospel is related as one entire scene among Jews and Gentiles, he bids adieu to the work; in order to leave those whom he had gathered together in a new position, and in a certain sense to themselves.\* It is a discourse which marks the cessation of one phase of the assembly — that of apostolic labors — and the entrance into another — its responsibility to stand fast now that those labors had ceased, the service of the elders whom “the Holy Ghost had made overseers,” and at the same time the dangers and difficulties that would attend the cessation of apostolic labor, and complicate the work of the elders on whom the responsibility would now more especially devolve.

[\* If Paul was ever set free and returned to these parts (not necessarily to Ephesus) as Philippians and Philemon and perhaps 2 Timothy would lead us to suppose, we have no scriptural account of it.]

The first remark that flows from the consideration of this discourse is, that apostolic succession is entirely denied by it. Owing to the absence of the apostle various difficulties would arise, and there would be no one in his place to meet or to prevent these difficulties. Successor therefore he had none. In the second place the fact appears that, this energy which bridled the spirit of evil, once away, devouring wolves from without, and teachers of perverse things from within, would lift up their heads and attack the simplicity and the happiness of the assembly, which would be harassed by the efforts of Satan without possessing apostolic energy to withstand them.

This testimony of Paul's is of the highest importance with regard to the whole ecclesiastical system. The attention of the elders who are left in charge is directed elsewhere than to present apostolical care (as having no longer this resource, or anything that officially replaced it), in order that the assembly might be kept in peace and sheltered from evil. It was their part to care for the assembly in these circumstances. In the next place, that which was principally to be done for the hindrance of evil was to shepherd the flock, and to watch, whether over themselves or over the flock, for that purpose. He reminds them how he had himself exhorted them night and day with tears. Let them therefore watch. He then commends them, neither to Timothy, nor to a bishop, but — in a way that sets aside all official resource — to God, and to the word of His grace which was able to build them up and assure them of the inheritance. This was where he left the assembly; that which it did afterwards is not my subject here. If John came later to work in these parts, it was a great favor from God, but it changed nothing in the position officially. His labors (with the exception of the warnings to the seven assemblies in the Apocalypse, where judgment is in question) regarded the individual life, its character, and that which sustained it.

With deep and touching affection Paul parts from the assembly at Ephesus. Who filled the gap? At the same time he appealed to their consciences for the uprightness of his walk. The free labors of the apostle of the Gentiles were ended. Solemn and affecting thought! He had been the instrument chosen of God to communicate to the world His counsels respecting the assembly, and to establish in the midst of the world this

precious object of His affections united to Christ at His right hand. What would become of it down here?

After this time the apostle has to give account of himself, and to accomplish in a striking manner the predictions of the Lord. Brought before tribunals by the malice of the Jews, given up through their hatred into the hands of the Gentiles, it was all to turn to a testimony. Kings and rulers shall hear the gospel, but the love of many will grown cold. This in general is his position; but there were details personal to himself.

We may remark here a leading feature in this book which has been little noticed; that is, the development of the enmity of the Jews, bringing on their final rejection, such as they were. The Acts ends with the last case presented; the work in the midst of that people is left in oblivion, and that of Paul occupies the whole scene in the historical narrative given by the Spirit. The antagonism of the Jews to the manifestation of the assembly, which took their place and blotted out the distinction between them and the Gentiles, by bringing in heaven and full sovereign grace in contrast with law, which while universal in its direction was given to a distinct people (grace of which the sinner availed himself by faith) this antagonism, presenting itself at every step in the career of the apostle, although he acted with all possible circumspection, is aroused in its full intensity at Jerusalem, its natural center, and manifests itself by violence and by efforts made with the Gentiles for the purpose of cutting off Paul from the earth. This rendered the apostle's position very serious with regard to the Gentiles at Jerusalem — a city the more jealous of its religious importance from having in fact under Roman bondage lost the reality of it, through its being transformed into a spirit of rebellion against the authority which crippled it.

After the history of Christianity, viewed as connected with Judaism (in reference to the promises and their fulfillment in the Messiah), we find Paul in three different positions. First, condescending, for the purpose of conciliation, to take account of that which still existed at Jerusalem, and even addressing the Jews everywhere in their synagogues, as having administratively the first right to hear the gospel (“To the Jew first and then to the Greek”) for Jesus was the minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to fulfill the promises made to the fathers. In this respect he

never failed, and he establishes these principles clearly and dogmatically in the Epistle to the Romans. We next find him, in all the liberty of the full truth of grace and of the purposes of God, in his own especial work from which he condescended in grace. This is recorded in the Epistle to the Ephesians. In both these cases he acts under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, fulfilling the Lord's will. Afterwards, in the third place, we see him in conflict with the hostility of legal Judaism, the emissaries of which he met continually, and into the very focus of which he at length threw himself by going to Jerusalem, in that part of his history which we are now considering. How much was of God — how much was the consequence of his own steps — is matter for consideration in this narrative. That the hand of God was in it for the good of the assembly, and in conducting His beloved servant for his own good in the end, is beyond all doubt. We have only to search out how far the will and the mind of Paul came in, as means which God used to bring about the result He intended, whether for the assembly or for His servant, or for the Jews. These thoughts are of the deepest interest, and require humble examination of that which God has set before us to instruct us on this point in the history which the Spirit Himself has given us of these things.

The first thing which strikes us at the beginning of this history is that the Holy Ghost tells him not to go to Jerusalem (chap. 21:4). This word has evident importance. Paul felt himself bound: there was something in his own mind which impelled him thither, a feeling that forced him in that direction; but the Spirit, in His positive and outward testimony forbade his going.

The apostle's intention had been to go to Rome. The apostle of the Gentiles sent forth to preach the gospel to every creature, there was nothing of self in this project that was not according to grace (Romans 1:13-15). Nevertheless God had not allowed him to go thither. He was obliged to write his Epistle to them without seeing them. Heaven is the metropolis of Christianity. Rome and Jerusalem must have no place with Paul, except as to bearing with the one in affection, and being ready, when he might, to evangelise the other. Acts 19:21, which is translated "in the spirit," only means the spirit of Paul. He purposed, in his own mind, saying, "When I have been there, I must also see Rome." Afterwards he charge himself with the offerings of the saints in Achaia and Macedonia.

He wished to prove his affection for the poor of his own people (Galatians 2:10). This was all well. I do not know if it was a function suited to an apostle. It was an evidently Jewish feeling, which set peculiar value on the poor of Jerusalem, and so far on Jerusalem itself. A Jew would rather be poor at Jerusalem than rich among the Gentiles. Poor Christians were there no doubt from the time of their conversion, but that was the origin of this system (compare Nehemiah 11:2 and Acts 24:17). All this belonged to relationship with Judaism (Romans 15:25-28). Paul loved the nation to which he belonged after the flesh, and which had been the people beloved of God and was still His people although rejected for a time, the remnant having now to enter the kingdom of God through Christianity. This attachment of Paul to them (which had its right and deeply affecting side, but which on another side had to do with the flesh) led him into the center of Judaism. He was the messenger of the heavenly glory, which brought out the doctrine of the assembly composed of Jews and Gentiles, united without distinction in the one body of Christ, thus blotting out Judaism; but his love for his nation carried him, I repeat, into the very center of hostile Judaism — Judaism enraged against this spiritual equality. His testimony, the Lord had told him, they would not receive.

Nevertheless the hand of God was doubtless in it. Paul individually found his level.

As the instrument of God's revelation, he proclaims in all its extent and all its force the purpose of the sovereign grace of God. The wine is not adulterated; it flows out as pure as he had received it. And he walked in a remarkable way at the height of the revelation committed to him. Still Paul individually is a man; he must be exercised and manifested, and in those exercises to which God has subjected us. Where the flesh has found its pleasure, the sphere in which it has gratified itself, it is there that, when God acts, it finds its sorrow. Yet, if God saw fit to prove His servant and manifest him to himself, He stood by him, and blessed him even through the trial itself — turned it into testimony, and refreshed the heart of His beloved and faithful servant. The manifestation of that in him which is not according to the Spirit, or to the height of his calling, was in love for his blessing and for that of the assembly. Blessed is he who can walk as faithfully and maintain his standing to the same degree through grace in the

path of grace! Nevertheless Christ is the only model. I see no one who (in another career) so much resembled Him in His public life as Paul.

The more we search into the apostle's walk the more we shall see this resemblance. Only that Christ was the model of perfection in obedience; in His precious servant there was the flesh. Paul would have been the first to acknowledge that perfection may be ascribed to Jesus only.

I believe then that the hand of God was in this journey of Paul's; that in His sovereign wisdom He willed that His servant should undertake it, and also have blessing in it; but that the means employed to lead him into it according to that sovereign wisdom, was the apostle's human affection for the people who were his kinsmen after the flesh; and that he was not led into it by the Holy Ghost acting on the part of Christ in the assembly. This attachment to his people, this human affection, met with that among the people which put it in its place. Humanly speaking, it was an amiable feeling; but it was not the power of the Holy Ghost founded on the death and resurrection of Christ. Here there was no longer Jew nor Gentile. In the living Christ it was right. Christ went on in it to the end in order that He might die; for this purpose He came.

Paul's affection was good in itself, but as a spring of action it did not come up to the height of the work of the Spirit, who on Christ's part had sent him afar from Jerusalem to the Gentiles in order to reveal the assembly as His body united to Him in heaven. Thus the Jews hearkened to him till it came to that word, and then they cried out and raised the tumult which caused Paul to be made prisoner.\* He suffered for the truth, but where that truth had no access according to Christ's own testimony: "they will not receive thy testimony concerning me." It was necessary however that the Jews should manifest their hatred to the gospel, and give this final proof of their inveterate opposition to the ways of God in grace.

[\* And this circumstance is worthy of note, that it was Christ's declaration that he should go to the Gentiles; to which we may add that this at the time was accompanied by the declaration, "Get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me." So that what declared his testimony was of no avail in Jerusalem was the occasion of his being seized. On Christ's word and his own showing, his apostolic service was not there but elsewhere.]

At the same time, whatever may have been the subsequent labors of the apostle (if there were any the Holy Ghost does not make mention of them: Paul sees the Jews in his own house, and receives all who come to him; but) the page of the Spirit's history closes here. This history is ended. The apostolic mission to the Gentiles in connection with the founding of the assembly is concluded. Rome is but the prison of the apostle of the truth, to whom the truth had been committed. Jerusalem rejects him, Rome imprisons him and puts him to death as it had done to Jesus, whom the blessed apostle had to resemble in this also according to his desire in Philippians 3; for Christ and conformity to Him was his only object. It was given him to find this conformity in his service, as it was so strongly in his heart and soul, with the necessary difference between a ministry which was not to break the bruised reed nor lift up its voice in the street, and one which in testimony was to bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

The mission of the twelve to the Gentiles, going out from Jerusalem (Matthew 28), never took place, so far as any record of it by the Holy Ghost goes.\* Jerusalem detained them. They did not even go over the cities of Israel. The ministry of the circumcision was given to Peter, that of the Gentiles to Paul in connection with the doctrine of the assembly and of a glorious Christ — a Christ whom he no longer knew after the flesh. Jerusalem, to which the apostle was drawn by his affection, rejected both him and his mission. His ministry to the Gentiles, so far as the free effect of the power of the Spirit, ended likewise. Ecclesiastical history may perhaps tell us more; nevertheless God has taken care to bury it in profound darkness. Nothing farther is owned by the Spirit. We hear no more of the apostles at Jerusalem; and Rome, as we have seen, had none, so far as the Holy Ghost informs us, excepting that the apostle of the Gentiles was a prisoner there and finally put to death. Man has failed everywhere on earth. The religious and political centers of the world — centers, according to God, as to the earth — have rejected the testimony, and put the testifier to death; but the result has been that Heaven has maintained its rights inviolate and in their absolute purity. The assembly the true heavenly and eternal metropolis of glory and of the ways of God — the assembly which had its place in the counsels of God before the world was — the assembly which answers to His heart in grace as united to Christ in glory — remains the object of faith. It is revealed according to

the mind of God, and perfectly such as it is in His mind, until, as the heavenly Jerusalem, it shall be manifested in glory, in connection with the accomplishment of the ways of God on the earth, in the re-establishment of Jerusalem as the center of His earthly dealings in grace, His throne, His metropolis in the midst even of the Gentiles, and in the disappearance even of Gentile power, the seat and center of which was Rome.

[\* Mark 16:20 is the only passage which may be supposed to allude to what would fulfill it; and even not so as such, for that and Colossians 1:6 refer to all the world, and are founded on ascension, not a mission to the Gentiles only founded on resurrection.]

Let us now examine the thoughts of the apostle, and that which took place historically. Paul wrote from Corinth to Rome, when he had this journey in view. Christianity had flowed towards that center of the world, without any apostle whatsoever having planted it there. Paul follows it. Rome is, as it were, a part of his apostolic domain which escapes him (Romans 1:13-15). He returns to the subject in chapter 15. If he might not come (for God will not begin with the capital of the world — compare the destruction of Hazor in Canaan, Joshua 11:11), he will at least write to them on the ground of his universal apostleship to the Gentiles. Some Christians were already established there: so God would have it. But they were in some sort, of his province. Many of them had been personally in connection with him. See the number and character of the salutations at the end of the epistle, which have a peculiar stamp, making the Roman Christians in great part the children of Paul.

In Romans 15:14-29 he develops his apostolic position with respect to the Romans and others. He desired also to go into Spain when he had seen the brethren at Rome a little. He wishes to impart spiritual gifts to them, but to be comforted by their mutual faith, to enjoy a little of their company. They are in connection with him; but they have their place as Christians at Rome without his ever having been there. When therefore he had seen them a little, he would go into Spain. But he was disappointed with regard to these projects. All that we are told by the Holy Ghost is that he was a prisoner at Rome. Profound silence as to Spain. Instead of going farther when he had seen them and imparted gifts, he remains two years a prisoner at Rome. It is not known whether he was set free or not. Some say yes, others no; the word says nothing.



It is here, when he had laid open his intentions and the character of his relationships in the Spirit with Rome, and when a large field opens before him in the west, that his old affection for his people and for Jerusalem intervenes — "But now I go unto Jerusalem to carry help to the saints" (Romans 15:25-28). Why not go to Rome according to the energy of the Spirit, his work being finished in Greece? (v. 23). God, no doubt, ordained that those things should happen at Jerusalem, and that Rome and the Romans should have this sad place with respect to the testimony of a glorified Christ and of the assembly, which the apostle rendered before the world. But as to Paul, why put rebellious Jerusalem between his evangelical desire and his work? The affection was good, and the service good — for a deacon, or a messenger of the churches: but for Paul, who had the whole west open before his evangelising thought!

For the moment Jerusalem intercepted his view. Accordingly, as we have seen, the Holy Ghost warned him on his way. He foresaw himself also the danger he was running into (Romans 15:30-32). He was sure (v. 29) of coming in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ; but he was not sure that he should come with joy. The thing for which he asked their prayers turned out quite otherwise than he desired. He was delivered, but as a prisoner. He took courage when he saw the brethren at Appii Forum and the Three Taverns. There was no journey into Spain either.

All this to me is very solemn. The Lord, full of grace and tenderness, was with His poor but beloved servant. In the case of such an one as Paul, it is a most affecting history, and the Lord's ways adorable and perfect in goodness. The reality of faith is there in full; the ways of grace perfect, and perfect in tenderness also, in the Lord. He stands by His servant in the trial in which he finds himself, to encourage and strengthen him. At the same time, with regard to the desire of going to Jerusalem, he is warned by the Spirit, and its consequences are set before him; and, not turning back, he undergoes the needful discipline, which brings his soul into its place, and a full place of blessing before God. His walk finds its level as to spiritual power. He feels the power outwardly of that whereof he had felt the moral power seeking to hinder his ministry; and a chain upon his flesh answers to the liberty he had allowed it. There was justice in God's dealings. His servant was too precious for it to be otherwise. At the same time, as to result and testimony, God ordered everything for His own

glory, and with perfect wisdom as to the future welfare of the assembly. Jerusalem, as we have seen, rejects the testimony to the Gentiles, in a word the ways of God in the assembly (compare 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16); and Rome becomes the prison of that testimony; while according to the Lord's promise the testimony is carried before rulers and kings, and before Caesar himself.

I have said that grace put Paul into the position of Christ given up to the Gentiles by the hatred of the Jews. It was a great favor. The difference — besides the infinite love of the Lord who gave Himself up — was that Jesus was there in His true place before God. He had come to the Jews: that He should be delivered up was the crowning act of His devotedness and His service. It was in fact the offering Himself by the eternal Spirit. It was the sphere of His service as sent of God. Paul re-entered it: the energy of the Holy Ghost had placed him outside — "Delivering thee," said the Lord, "from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I now send thee to open their eyes," etc. (Acts 26:17). Jesus had taken him out from them both, to exercise a ministry that united the two in one body in Christ in heaven who had thus sent him. In his service Paul knew no one after the flesh; in Christ Jesus there was neither Jew nor Greek.

Let us resume his history. He is warned by the Holy Ghost not to go up (chap. 21:4). Nevertheless he continues his journey to Caesarea. A prophet named Agabus comes down from Judea, and announces that Paul shall be bound and given up to the Gentiles. It might be said that this did not forbid his going. It is true; yet, coming after the other, it strengthened the warning already given. When he walked in the liberty of the Spirit, warned of danger, he fled from it, while braving every peril if the testimony required it. At Ephesus he allowed himself to be persuaded not to go into the theatre.

The Holy Ghost does not usually warn of danger. He leads in the path of the Lord, and if persecution comes, He gives strength to endure it. Here Paul was continually warned. His friends entreat him not to go up. He will not be persuaded. They hold their peace, little satisfied, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." And, I doubt not, it was His will, but for the accomplishment of purposes that Paul knew not by the intelligence given

of the Holy Ghost. Only he felt pressed in spirit to go, and ready to suffer all things for the Lord.

He departs therefore to Jerusalem; and when there, he goes to the house of James, and all the elders assemble. Paul relates to them the work of God among the Gentiles. They turn to their Judaism, of which the multitude were full, and, while rejoicing in the good that was wrought of God by the Spirit, they wish Paul to show himself obedient to the law. The believers in Jerusalem must needs come together on the arrival of Paul, and their prejudices with regard to the law must be satisfied. Paul has brought himself into the presence of man's exigencies: to refuse compliance with them would be to say that their thoughts about him were true; to act according to their desire was to make a rule, not of the guidance of the Spirit in all liberty of love, but of the ignorant and prejudiced condition of these Jewish believers. It is that Paul was there, not according to the Spirit as an apostle, but according to his attachment to these former things. One must be above the prejudices of others, and free from their influence, to be able to condescend to them in love.

Being there, Paul can hardly do other than satisfy their demands. But the hand of God is in it. This act throws him into the power of his enemies. Seeking to please the believing Jews, he finds himself in the lion's mouth, in the hands of the Jews who were adversaries to the gospel. It may be added that we hear nothing more of the Christians of Jerusalem. They had done their work. I have no doubt that they accepted the alms of the Gentiles.

The whole city being moved and the temple shut, the commander of the band comes to rescue Paul from the Jews who wished to kill him, taking him however into custody himself, for the Romans were used to these tumults, and heartily despised this nation beloved of God, but proud and degraded in their own condition. Nevertheless Paul commands the respect of the captain of the band by his manner of addressing him, and he permits him to speak to the people. To the chief captain Paul had spoken in Greek; but, always ready to win by the attentions of love, and especially when the loved though rebellious people were in question, he speaks to them in Hebrew; that is, in their ordinary language called Hebrew. He does not enlarge upon what the Lord said revealing Himself to him, but he gives

them a particular account of his subsequent interview with Ananias, a faithful Jew and esteemed of all. He then enters on the point which necessarily characterised his position and his defence. Christ had appeared to him, saying, "They will not receive thy testimony at Jerusalem. I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." Blessed be God! it is the truth; but why tell it to those very persons who, according to his own words, would not receive his testimony? The only thing which gave authority to such a mission was the Person of Jesus, and they did not believe in it.

In his testimony to the people the apostle laid stress in vain upon the Jewish piety of Ananias: genuine as it might be, it was but a broken reed. Nevertheless it was all, except his own. His discourse had but one effect — to bring out the violent and incorrigible hatred of this unhappy nation to every thought of grace in God, and the unbounded pride which indeed went before the fall that crushed them. The chief captain, seeing the violence of the people, and not at all understanding what was going on, with the haughty contempt of a Roman, orders Paul to be bound and scourged to make him confess what it meant. Now Paul was himself a Roman citizen, and born such, while the chief captain had purchased that freedom. Paul quietly makes this fact known, and they who were about to scourge him withdraw. The chief captain was afraid because he had bound him; but, as his authority was concerned in it, he leaves him bound. The next day he looses him and brings him before the council, or Sanhedrim, of the Jews. The people, not merely their rulers, had rejected grace.

Paul addresses the council with the gravity and dignity of an upright man accustomed to walk with God. It is not a testimony born to them for their good; but the appeal of a good conscience to their consciences, if they had any. The immediate answer is an outrage on the part of the judge or chief of the council. Paul, roused by this procedure, denounces judgment on him from God; but, warned that he was the high priest (who was not so clothed as to be recognised), he excuses himself by his ignorance of the fact, quoting the formal prohibition of the law to speak evil of the ruler of the people. All this was right and in place with regard to men; but the Holy Ghost could not say, "I wist not." It is not the activity of the Spirit performing the work of grace and of testimony. But it is the means of the final judgment of God upon the people. It is in this character, as regards the Jews, that Paul appears here. Paul makes a much better appearance

than his judges, who thoroughly disgrace themselves and manifest their dreadful condition; but he does not appear for God before them. Afterwards he avails himself of the different parties of which the council were composed to throw complete disorder into it, by declaring himself to be a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and called in question for a dogma of that sect. This was true; but it was below the height of his own word, "that which was gain I counted loss for Christ's sake." The Jews however fully manifest themselves. That which Paul said raises a tumult, and the chief captain takes him from among them. God has all things at His disposal. A nephew of Paul's, never mentioned elsewhere, hears of an ambush laid for him and warns him of it. Paul sends him to the chief captain, who expedites the departure of Paul under a guard to Caesarea. God watched over him, but all is on the level of human and providential ways. There is not the angel as in Peter's case, nor the earthquake as at Philippi. We are sensibly on different ground.

Paul appears before the governors in succession — the Sanhedrim, Felix, Festus, Agrippa, and afterwards Caesar. And here, when occasion offers, we have striking appeals to conscience; when his defence is in question, the manly and honest declarations of a good conscience, that rose above the passions and interests that surrounded him. I pass over in silence the worldly egotism which betrays itself in Lysias and Festus, by their assumption of all sorts of good qualities and good conduct; the mixture of awakened conscience and absence of principle in the governors; the desire to please the Jews for their own importance, or to facilitate their government of a rebellious people; and the contempt felt by those who were not as responsible as Lysias for the public tranquillity. The position of Agrippa and all the details of the history have a remarkable stamp of truth, and present the various characters in so living a style that we seem to be in the scenes described. We see the persons moving in it. This moreover strikingly characterises the writings of Luke.

Other circumstances claim our attention. Festus, in order to please the Jews, proposed to take Paul to Jerusalem. But Rome was to have its share in the rejection of the gospel of grace, of the testimony to the assembly; and Paul appeals to Caesar. Festus must therefore send him thither, although embarrassed to know what crime he is to charge him with in sending him. Sad picture of man's injustice! But everything accomplishes

the purposes of God. In the use of the means Paul succeed no better than in his attempt to satisfy the Jews. It was perhaps to the eye of man his only resource under the circumstances; but the Holy Ghost is careful to inform us that he might have been set at liberty if he had not appealed to Caesar.

In Agrippa there was, I believe, more curiosity than conscience, though there may have been some desire to profit by the occasion to know what the doctrine was which had so stirred up people's minds, a disposition to inquire which was more than curiosity. In general his words are taken as if he was not far from being convinced that Christianity was true: perhaps he would have been so if his passions had not stood in the way. But it may be questioned whether this is the force of the Greek, as generally supposed, and not, rather, 'In a little you are going to make a Christian of me,' covering his uneasiness at the appeal to his professed Judaism before Festus, by an affected and slighting remark. And such I believe to be the case. The notion of an "almost christian" is quite a mistake, though a man's mind may be under influences which ought to lead him to it, and yet reject it. He would have been glad for Paul to be set free. He expressed his conviction that it might have been done if he had not appealed to Caesar. He gives his opinion to Festus as a wise and reasonable man; but his words were in reality dictated by his conscience — words that he could venture to utter when Festus and all the rest were agreed that Paul had done nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

God would have the innocence of his beloved servant proved in the face of the world. His discourse tends to this. He goes farther, but his object is to give account of his conduct. His miraculous conversion is related in order to justify his subsequent career; but it is so related as to act upon the conscience of Agrippa, who was acquainted with Jewish things, and evidently desired to hear something of Christianity, which he suspected to be the truth. Accordingly he lays hold with eagerness of the opportunity that presents itself to hear the apostle explain it. But he remains much where he was. His condition of soul opens however the mouth of Paul, and he addresses himself directly and particularly to the king; who moreover, evidently engrossed by the subject, had called on him to speak. To Festus it was all a rhapsody.

The dignity of Paul's manner before all these governors is perfect. He addresses himself to the conscience with a forgetfulness of self that showed a man in whom communion with God, and the sense of his relationship with God, carried the mind above all effect of circumstances. He was acting for God; and, with a perfect deference for the position of those he addressed, we see that which was morally altogether superior to them. The more humiliating his circumstances, the more beauty there is in this superiority. Before the Gentiles he is a missionary from God. He is again (blessed be God!) in his right place. All that he said to the Jews was right and deserved; but why was he, who had been delivered from the people, subjected to their total want of conscience, and their blind passions which gave no place for testimony? Nevertheless, as we have seen, it was to be so in order that the Jews might in every way fill up the measure of their iniquity, and indeed that the blessed apostle might follow the steps of his Master.

Paul's address to king Agrippa furnishes us with the most complete picture of the entire position of the apostle, as he himself looked at it when his long service and the light of the Holy Ghost illuminated his backward glance.

He does not speak of the assembly — that was a doctrine for instruction, and not a part of his history. But everything that related to his personal history, in connection with his ministry, he gives in detail. He had been a strict Pharisee; and here he connects the doctrine of Christ with the hopes of the Jews. He was in bonds “for the hope of the promise made unto the fathers.” No doubt resurrection entered into it. Why should the king think resurrection impossible, that God was not able to raise the dead? This brings him to another point. He had verily thought with himself that he ought to do many things against Jesus of Nazareth, and had carried them out with all the energy of his character, and with the bigotry of a devout Jew. His present condition, as a witness among the Gentiles, depended on the change wrought in him by the revelation of the Lord when he was engaged in seeking to destroy His name. Near Damascus a light brighter than the sun struck them all to the earth, and he alone heard the voice of the Righteous One, so that he knew from His own mouth that it was Jesus, and that He looked upon those who believed in Him as Himself. He could not resist such a testimony. But as this was the great grievance to

the Jews, he shows that his own position was formally marked out by the Lord Himself. He was called to give ocular evidence of the glory which he had seen; that is, of Jesus in that glory; and of other things also, for the manifestation of which Jesus would again appear to him. A glorious Christ known (personally) only in heaven was the subject of the testimony committed to him. For this purpose He had set Paul apart from the Jews as much as from the Gentiles, his mission belonging immediately to heaven, having its origin there; and he was sent formally by the Lord of glory to the Gentiles, to change their position with respect to God through faith in this glorious Jesus, opening their eyes, bringing them out of darkness into light, from the power of Satan to God, and giving them an inheritance among the sanctified. This was a definite work. The apostle was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, and he had taught the Gentiles to turn to God, and to act as those who had done so. For this cause the Jews sought to kill him.

Nothing more simple, more truthful, than this history. It put the case of Paul and the conduct of the Jews in the clearest light. When called to order by Festus, who naturally thought it nothing more than irrational enthusiasm, he appeals with perfect dignity and quick discernment to Agrippa's knowledge of the facts upon which all this was based: for the thing had not been done in a corner.

Agrippa was not far from being convinced; but his heart was unchanged. The wish that Paul expresses brings the matter back to its moral reality. The meeting is dissolved. The king resumes his kingly place in courtesy and condescension, and the disciple that of a prisoner; but, whatever might be the apostle's position, we see in him a heart thoroughly happy and filled with the Spirit and love of God. Two years of prison had brought him no depression of heart or faith, but had only set him free from his harassing connection with the Jews, to give him moments spent with God.

Agrippa, surprised and carried away by Paul's clear and straightforward narrative,\* relieves himself from the pressure of Paul's personal address by saying, 'In a little you are going to make a Christian of me.' Charity might have said, "Would to God that thou wert!" But there is a spring in the heart of Paul that does not stop there. "Would to God," says he, "that not only thou, but all those that hear me, were... altogether such as I am,



except these bonds!” What happiness and what love (and in God these two things go together) are expressed in these words! A poor prisoner, aged and rejected, at the end of his career he is rich in God. Blessed years that he had spent in prison! He could give himself as a model of happiness; for it filled his heart. There are conditions of soul which unmistakably declare themselves. And why should he not be happy? His fatigues ended, his work in a certain sense finished, he possessed Christ and in Him all things. The glorious Jesus, who had brought him into the pains and labor of the testimony, was now his possession and his crown. Such is ever the case. The cross in service — by virtue of what Christ Is — is the enjoyment of all that He is, when the service is ended; and in some sort is the measure of that enjoyment. This was the case with Christ Himself, in all its fullness; it is ours, in our measure, according to the sovereign grace of God. Only Paul’s expression supposes the Holy Ghost acting fully in the heart in order that it may be free to enjoy, and that the Spirit is not grieved.

[\* It is hardly to be read “almost.” Relieving himself, Agrippa says, “You’ll soon be making a Christian of me,” covering his feelings, as I have said, by a slighting speech. But I have no doubt his mind was greatly wrought upon.]

A glorious Jesus — a Jesus who loved him, a Jesus who put the seal of His approbation and love upon his service, a Jesus who would take him to Himself in glory, and with whom he was one (and that known according to the abundant power of the Holy Ghost, according to divine righteousness), a Jesus who revealed the Father, and through whom he had the place of adoption — was the infinite source of joy to Paul, the glorious object of his heart and of his faith; and, being known in love, filled his heart with that love overflowing towards all men. What could he wish them better than to be as he was except his bonds? How, filled with this love, could he not wish it, or not be full of this large affection? Jesus was its measure.

His innocence fully established and acknowledged by his judges, the purposes of God must still be accomplished. His appeal to Caesar must carry him to Rome, that he may bear testimony there also. In his position here he again resembles Jesus. But at the same time, if we compare them, the servant, blessed as he is, grows dim, and is eclipsed before Christ, so that we could no longer think of him. Jesus offered Himself up in grace; He

appealed to God only; He answered but to bear testimony to the truth — that truth was the glory of His Person, His own rights, humbled as He was. His Person shines out through all the dark clouds of human violence, which could have had no power over Him had it not been the moment for thus fulfilling the will of God. For that purpose He yields to power given them from above. Paul appeals to Caesar. He is a Roman — a human dignity conferred by man, and available before men; he uses it for himself, God thus accomplishing His purposes. The one is blessed, and his services; the other is perfect, the perfect subject of the testimony itself.

Nevertheless, if there is no longer the free service of the Holy Ghost for Paul, and if he is a prisoner in the hands of the Romans, his soul at least is filled with the Spirit. Between him and God all is liberty and joy. All this shall turn to his salvation, that is, to his definitive victory, in his contest with Satan. How blessed! Through the communications of the Spirit of Jesus Christ the word of God shall not be bound. Others shall gain strength and liberty in view of his bonds, even although, in the low state of the church, some take advantage of them. But Christ will be preached and magnified, and with that Paul is content. Oh how true this is, and the perfect joy of the heart, come what may! We are the subjects of grace (God be praised!), as well as instruments of grace in service. Christ alone is its object, and God secures His glory — nothing more is needed: this itself is our portion and our perfect joy.

It will be remarked in this interesting history, that at the moment when Paul might have been the most troubled, when his course was perhaps the least evidently according to the power of the Spirit, when he brought disorder into the council by using arguments which afterwards he hesitates himself entirely to justify — it is then that the Lord, full of grace, appears to him to encourage and strengthen him. The Lord, who formerly had told him at Jerusalem to go away because they would not receive his testimony, who had sent him warnings not to go thither, but who accomplished His own purposes of grace in the infirmity and through the human affections of His servant, by their means even, exercising at the same time His wholesome discipline in His divine wisdom by these same means — Jesus appears to him to tell him that, as he had testified of Him at Jerusalem, so should he bear witness at Rome also. This is the way that the Lord interprets in grace the whole history, at the moment when His

servant might have felt all that was painful in his position, perhaps have been overwhelmed by it, remembering that the Spirit had forbidden him to go up; for, when in trial, a doubt is torment. The faithful and gracious Savior intervenes therefore to encourage Paul, and to put His own interpretation on the position of His poor servant, and to mark the character of His love for him. If it was necessary to exercise discipline for his good on account of his condition and to perfect him, Jesus was with him in the discipline. Nothing more touching than the tenderness, the opportuneness, of this grace. Moreover, as we have said, it all accomplished the purposes of God with regard to the Jews, to the Gentiles, to the world. For God can unite in one dispensation the most various ends.

And now, restored, reanimated by grace, Paul shows himself in his journey to be master of the position. It is he who counsels, according to the communication he receives from God, he who encourages, he who acts, in every way, on God's part, in the midst of the scene around him. The description, full of life and reality, which Luke his companion, gives of this voyage, needs no comment. It is admirable as a living picture of the whole scene. Our concern is to see what Paul was amid the false confidence, or the distress of the whole company.

At Melita we find him again exercising his accustomed power among that barbarous people. One sees that God is with him. Evangelisation does not, however, appear in the account of his sojourn there, or of his journey.

Landed in Italy, we see him depressed: the love of the brethren encourages and reanimates him; and he goes on to Rome, where he dwells two years in a house that he hires, a soldier being with him as a guard. Probably those who carried him to Rome had been given to understand that it was only a matter of Jewish jealousy, for all through the journey they treated him with all possible respect. Besides he was a Roman.

Arrived at Rome, he sends for the Jews; and here, for the last time, their condition is set before us, and the judgment which had been hanging over their heads ever since the utterance of the prophecy (which was especially connected with the house of David and with Judah) the judgment pronounced by Esaias, which the Lord Jesus declared should come upon them because of His rejection, the execution of which was suspended by

the long-suffering of God, until the testimony of the Holy Ghost was also rejected — this judgment is here brought to mind by Paul at the end of the historical part of the New Testament. It is their definitive condition solemnly declared by the minister of sovereign grace, and which should continue until God interposed in power to give them repentance, and to deliver them, and to glorify Himself in them by grace.

We have already marked this characteristic of the Acts, which comes out here in a clear and striking manner — the setting aside of the Jews. That is to say, they set themselves aside by the rejection of the testimony of God, of the work of God. They put themselves outside that which God was setting up. They will not follow Him in His progress of grace. And thus they are altogether left behind, without God and without present communication with Him. His word abides for ever, and His mercy; but others take the place of positive and present relationship with Him. Individuals from among them enter into another sphere on other grounds; but Israel disappears and is blotted out for a time from the sight of God.

It is this which is presented in the book of Acts. The patience of God is exercised towards the Jews themselves in the preaching of the gospel and the apostolic mission at the beginning. Their hostility develops itself by degrees and reaches its height in the case of Stephen. Paul is raised up, a witness of grace towards them as an elect remnant, for he was himself of Israel; but introducing, in connection with a heavenly Christ, something entirely new as doctrine — the assembly, the body of Christ in heaven; and the setting aside of all distinction between Jew and Gentile as sinners, and in the oneness of that body. This is linked historically with that which had been established at Jerusalem, in order to maintain unity and the connection of the promises; but in itself, as a doctrine, it was a thing hidden in God in all the ages, having been in His purposes of grace before the world was. The enmity of the Jews to this truth never abated. They used every means to excite the Gentiles against those who taught the doctrine, and to prevent the formation of the assembly itself. God, having acted with perfect patience and grace unto the end, puts the assembly into the place of the Jews, as His house, and the vessel of His promises on earth, by making it His habitation by the Spirit. The Jews were set aside (alas! their spirit soon took possession of the assembly itself); and the assembly, and the clear and positive doctrine of no difference between Jew

and Gentile (by nature alike the children of wrath), and of their common and equal privileges as members of one only body, has been fully declared and made the basis of all relationship between God and every soul possessed of faith. This is the doctrine of the apostle in the Epistles to the Romans and Ephesians\* At the same time the gift of eternal life, as promised before the world was, has been made manifest by being born again\*\* (the commencement of a new existence with a divine character), and partaking of divine righteousness; these two things being united in our resurrection with Christ, by which, our sins being forgiven, we are placed before God as Christ, who is at once our life and our righteousness. This life manifests itself by conformity to the life of Christ on earth, who left us an example that we should follow His steps. It is the divine life manifested in man — in Christ as the object, in us as testimony.

[\* In Romans in their personal position, in Ephesians in the corporate.]

[\*\* The word “regeneration” is not applied in scripture to our being born again; it is a change of position in us connected with our having died with Him and resurrection. It is found twice; once in Matthew 19 it is Christ’s coming kingdom; and in Titus it is the washing of baptism, as typically bringing out of the old Adam state and into the christian, but distinguished from the renewing of the Holy Ghost.]

The cross of Christ is the basis, the fundamental center, of all these truths, the relations between God and man as he was, his responsibility; grace; expiation; the end of life, as to sin, the law, and the world; the putting away of sin through the death of Christ, and its consequences in us. Everything is established there, and gives place to the power of life that was in Christ, who there perfectly glorified God — to that new existence into which He entered as man into the presence of the Father; by whose glory, as well as by His own divine power, and by the energy of the Holy Ghost, He was raised from the dead.

This does not prevent God’s resuming His ways in government with the Jews on earth, when the church is complete and manifested on high; and which He will do according to His promises and the declarations of prophecy. The apostle explains this also in the Epistle to the Romans; but it belongs to the study of that epistle. The ways of God in judgment with regard to the Gentiles also at the same period will be shown us in the Apocalypse, as well as in prophetic passages of the Epistles in connection with the coming of Christ, and even with His government of the world in

general from the beginning to the end; together with the warnings necessary for the assembly when the days of deception begin to dawn and to be developed morally in the ruin of the assembly, viewed as God's witness in the world.

Our apostle, when brought to Rome, declares (upon the manifestation of unbelief among the Jews, which we have pointed out) that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles; and he dwells two whole years in the house he had hired, receiving those who came to him (for he had not liberty to go to them) preaching the kingdom of God and those things which concerned the Lord Jesus, with all boldness, no man forbidding him. And here the history is ended of this precious servant of God, beloved and honored by his Master, a prisoner in that Rome which, as head of the fourth empire, was to be the seat of opposition among the Gentiles, as Jerusalem of opposition among the Jews, to the kingdom and to the glory of Christ. The time for the full manifestation of that opposition was not yet come; but the minister of the assembly and of the gospel of glory is a prisoner there. It is thus that Rome begins its history in connection with the gospel that the apostle preached. Nevertheless God was with him.

# THE EPISTLES:

## INTRODUCTION

In the Epistles, we find the exposition of the result of that glorious work of grace, by which man is placed on entirely new ground with God, in reconciliation with Him; as well as the development of the counsels of God in Christ, according to which this new world is established and ordered. In giving this exposition of the ways of God in connection with the work which is their basis, the perfect efficacy of the work itself, and the order of our relations with God, are plainly set forth; so that the whole system, the whole plan of God, and the way in which it was put in execution, are presented. And in doing this, that which man is, that which God is, that which eternal life is, are clearly put before us.

The death and resurrection of Christ, as well as His exaltation to the right hand of God, form the center of all this instruction.

There are three great divisions in this instruction, which are connected in general with the instrument used of God in the communication of each part. 1st. The counsels of God, which are developed by Paul in connection with the revelation of true righteousness before God, the ground on which a man can be truly righteous before God — God's righteousness, man being a sinner. 2nd. The life of God, eternal life manifested and imparted. This is in John's epistle.\* 3rd. Christian life on the earth, in following a risen Christ. This we find in the Epistle of Peter, in connection with God's government of the world as such: the Christian is a pilgrim. There are also James and Jude. The first presents moral life — the life of faith on earth — as the true demonstration to men of our faith, and, in particular, of practical faith in Christ as well as in God, who answers our requests and our wants. On this account, while clearly and distinctly recognising faith in Christ, and our being begotten by the mighty grace of God through His word, this epistle scarcely rises in fact above such life as could have manifested and developed itself at any period whatsoever in a believer; only that it was the Christian, born of God, who now exemplified it, and that thus it was the law of liberty, because the new nature and the will of God ran together, and both were fully revealed in Christ. Thus the Epistle

of James is linked with the synagogue, and with Christians still in connection with Judaism, as we have seen them historically at Jerusalem with James at their head. The Epistle does not go beyond that position. It is the last testimony rendered to Israel looked at as the people of God, while at the same time distinguishing the quickened remnant who had faith in Christ, although they were not yet separated from the nation. Our habits of thought, founded not on imposed law without reason, but upon a much more complete development of Christianity (a development which was the manifestation of counsels much more ancient than the Jewish nation, for they were the eternal counsels of God), make it difficult for us to apprehend this form of the truth — a form in which it is connected with that which, because of the promises made to Israel, was historically its cradle here below.

[\* Paul's writings present man to God in and through Christ. John's Gospel presents God to man in Christ; the Epistles unfold divine life in Christ communicated to the believer; though Paul of course speaks of life, and John of man as in Christ before God. We must add for John's Gospel the coming of the Comforter. The reader will remark also that John's Gospel presents to us the new thing taking the place of Judaism, especially from chapter 4. Election runs all through it, very strongly expressed. The synoptical Gospels present Christ to the Jews, to man, to be received; but the world and the Jews are judged in John 1:10, 11. From that, our grace and the elect remnant, the sheep alone, are recognised, and the Jews treated as reprobate.]

If we have rightly understood the history of the Acts, it will make the position of believers, as we find it in the Epistle of James, much more intelligible to us. The Epistle is a correction of profession without life, and most valuable in this respect.

Jude has a very different character. It is not the cradle of Christianity, or of the assembly on earth: it is its decay and its death here below. It does not keep its first estate. This Epistle resembles a part of the second by Peter; but the latter speaks of the judgment brought in by the general government of God; Jude, of the fall of that which has had its existence since Pentecost under the eye of God, as responsible for the maintenance of the glory of His grace on the earth — a fall which, with regard to the present state of things, brings on the judgment of which Peter speaks, and which he carries on even to the dissolution of the earth and its elements. The evil that had already begun in its earliest germs gave rise to this development in Jude, and to the distinction of the true assembly, or at least of its members, who



would be presented in glory before the presence of the Lord in heaven. The Epistle to the Hebrews views the saint on earth, perfected as to acceptance by the work of Christ, and as having thus boldness to enter into the holiest, but as walking in weakness here on the earth, not united to Christ in heaven; hence it sets forth the priesthood of Christ as obtaining grace to help in time of need, while He appears always in the presence of God for us. It is not intercession in respect of sins (we have no more conscience of sins), but grace and help for us, such as we are. Christ's Person as God and man also is very fully brought out.

A more complete and more precise development will be found in studying the Epistles themselves.

We will begin with the Epistles of Paul. In the historical character of their doctrine James and Peter should precede them; this is to say, in the progress of the manifestations of God's counsels in their whole extent. But as developing the foundations of truth, and laying open its range as a whole, the Epistles of Paul have evidently the first place and throw light on that of the others. The Epistle to the Romans especially establishes the grand foundations of divine truth, and individual relationship with God, in the most plain and complete manner, so that we have no motive for deviating from the order in which we find them habitually placed. There is nothing in that order which, as to its details, is connected with any moral or chronological reason: it differs also in different countries and in different versions; but it is most convenient to take that order which the reader will find in his ordinary Bible. We may notice that which will be interesting in this respect as we study each epistle. It is probable that among the epistles of Paul that to the Thessalonians was the first. The date of the Epistle to the Galatians is less certain, but it was written after several years of labor; the two to the Corinthians, and that to the Romans, at Ephesus, Macedonia, and Corinth, respectively, during his journey round the Archipelago after his long sojourn at Ephesus; those to the Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians, during his captivity. I reserve the others, Hebrews included, for the study of those epistles, pointing out only that which it may be useful to know in those of which the date is pretty certain.

The First Epistle of John, we may add, hardly belongs to any particular period, save that (in setting forth the nature and character of the life of God, the touchstone of all profession, and safeguard against all error, against all that does not bear its stamp, and against all the pretensions which, being devoid of it, betray themselves by that very fact) this epistle supposes the entrance of these errors, and thus the latter days of the apostolic age. And this indeed is more or less the case with the epistles called catholic, from not being addressed to any particular assembly, as Paul's, the master-builder's, were. In these we find prophecies of the evil from the very first, and the fact that the mystery of iniquity was at work already. But the catholic epistles take that ground. Jude speaks of corruption entering in, John of apostates going out.

Let us now consider a little the epistles of Paul himself. They have more than one character, whilst all displaying that spirit gifted from on high, which expatiates on the wide range of the thoughts of God, and in its wonderful energy can enter at the same time into every detail, even into those of individual life; that knows how to place itself exactly in the relations of a fugitive slave with his master, in view of grace, and to set forth with divine clearness all the counsels by which the Father glorifies His Son, by making Him the center of all His purposes, of the system which results from the exercises of all His power.

The care of the assemblies, the development of the counsels of God, the exercise of brotherly affection, have each their place in his thoughts and his labors; while he is often forced to develop the truth in striving against errors which rend his heart, whether he thinks of the Christ whom they dishonor, and of the truth — the instrument of salvation — which they undermine; or whether he remembers the dear redeemed ones of Christ who are troubled by these errors, perhaps turned aside from the true path by them.

## ROMANS

The Epistle to the Romans is well placed at the head of all the others, as laying the foundations, in a systematic way, of the relations of man with God; reconciling at the same time this universal truth of man's position, first in responsibility, and secondly in grace, with the special promises made to the Jews. It also establishes the great principles of christian practice, the morality, not of man, but that which is the fruit of the light and revelation given by Christianity. It is important to see that it always views the Christian as in this world. He is justified and has life in Christ, but is here, and not viewed as risen with Him.

The following is, I believe, the arrangement of the epistle. After some introductory verses, which open his subject, several of which are of the deepest importance and furnish the key to the whole teaching of the epistle and man's real state with God (chap. 1:1-17), the apostle (to the end of chap. 3:20\*) shows man to be utterly corrupt and lost, in all the circumstances in which he stands. Without law, it was unbridled sin; with philosophy, it was judging evil and committing it; under law, it was breaking the law, while boasting of its possession, and dishonoring the name of Him with whose glory those who possessed it were (so to say) identified, by having received from Him that law as His people. From chapter 3:21 to the end of chapter 8 we find the remedy plainly set forth in two parts. In chapter 3:21 to the end of the chapter, in a general way, through faith the blood of Christ is the answer to all the sin which the apostle has just been describing; afterwards, in chapter 4, resurrection, the seal of Christ's work, and the witness of its efficacy for our justification. All this meets the responsibility of the child of Adam, which the law only aggravated, according to the full grace unfolded in chapter 5:1-11. But in chapter 8 they are assumed to be in Christ who is on high, placing him who had part in it (that is, every believer) in a new position before God in Christ, who thus gave him liberty and life — the liberty in which Christ Himself was, and the life which He Himself lived. It is this last which inseparably unites justification and holiness in life.

[\* After the introduction till the end of chapter 3 we find the evil, and the remedy which God has granted in the blood of Jesus Christ: and afterwards, in chapter 4, the resurrection of Christ (after being delivered for our offenses) for our justification, and thus peace with God, our present standing in favor, and hope of glory, with all its blessed consequences in the love of God. Abraham and David, the great roots of promise, confirmed this principle of grace and justification without works. This part closes with chapter 5:11, which divides the epistle into two distinct parts, as to its main doctrine of justification, and our standing before God. Of this farther on.]

But there is connected with this another point, which gives occasion to notice a division yet more important of the subjects of the epistle. From chapter 3:21 to the end of verse 11 of chapter 5, the apostle treats the subject of our sins — individual guilt is met by the blood of Christ who (in chap. 4), delivered for our offenses, is raised for our justification. But from chapter 5:12 the question of sin is treated — not a future judgment met, but deliverance from a present state.\* One ends in the blessing of chapter 5:1-11, the other in that of chapter 8.

[\* This, while the subject is sin in the flesh and death to it, involves the question of law — the means of discovering it when its spirituality is known.]

In chapters 9-11 the apostle reconciles these truths of the same salvation, common to every believing man without distinction, with the promise made to the Jews, bringing out the marvelous wisdom of God, and the way in which these things were foreseen, and revealed in the word.

He afterwards sets forth (in chap. 12 et seqq.) the practical christian spirit. In this last part, he alludes to the assembly as a body. Otherwise, it is in general man, the individual, before a God of righteousness; and the work of Christ, which places him there individually in peace. For the same reason, save in one passage in chapter 8 to bring in intercession, the ascension is not spoken of in Romans. It treats of death, and Christ's resurrection as the ground of a new status for man before God.\*

[\* See what has just been said on the division at chapter 5:11, and the fuller development of the division of the epistle farther on.]

Let us now examine the line of thought given by the Holy Ghost in this epistle. We find in it the answer to the solemn question of Job, angry at finding himself without resource in the presence of the judgment of God: "I know it is so of a truth, but how should man be just with God?"

“Nevertheless that is not the first thought which presents itself to the apostle. That is man’s necessity; but the gospel comes first revealing and bringing Christ. It is grace and Jesus which it brings in its hands; it speaks of God in love. This awakens the sense of need,\* while bringing that which meets it; and gives its measure in the grace that sets before us all the fullness of the love of God in Christ. It is a revelation of God in the Person of Christ. It puts man in his place before God, in the presence of Him who is revealed — both in himself, and in grace in Christ. All the promises are also accomplished in the Person of Him who is revealed. But it is important to note that it begins with the Person of Christ, not forgiveness or righteousness, though this is fully developed afterwards from verse 17.

[\* The heart and the conscience are both brought in. Law can show man’s guilt, and even, when spiritually known, man’s ruined state, to the conscience; a sense of need proves that the heart also is brought into action.]

There is no epistle in which the apostle places his apostleship on more positive and formal ground than in this; for at Rome he had no claim in virtue of his labors. He had never seen the Romans. He was none the less their apostle; for he was that of the Gentiles. He was a debtor to the Gentiles. He writes to them because he had received a mission from the Lord Himself towards all the Gentiles. They were in his allotted sphere of service as being Gentiles. It was his office to present them as an offering sanctified by the Holy Ghost (chap. 15:16). This was his commission. God was mighty in Peter towards the Jews; the mission of Paul was to the Gentiles. It was to him this mission was entrusted. The twelve moreover acknowledged it. If God has ordained that Paul should accomplish his mission in direct connection with heaven and outside the secular influence of the capital, and if Rome was to be a persecutor of the gospel, that city was not the less Gentile on this account. It belonged to Paul with reference to the gospel. According to the Holy Ghost Peter addresses the Jews in the exercise of his apostleship; Paul, the Gentiles.

This was the administrative order according to God; let us now come to the substance of his position. Paul was the servant of Christ — that was his character, his life. But others were, more or less, that. He was more than that. He was an apostle by the call of the Lord, a “called apostle”; and not only that, and laborious as occasion presented itself, he was nothing but that in life here below. He was set apart for the glad tidings of God.

These two last characters are very definitely warranted by the revelation of the Lord to Paul on the way to Damascus — his call, and his mission to the Gentiles on that occasion; and by setting apart by the Holy Ghost at Antioch, when he went forth to fulfill his mission.

He calls the gospel to which he was set apart, the gospel or glad tidings “of God”: the Holy Ghost presents it in its source. It is not that which man ought to be for God, nor yet the means merely by which man can approach Him on His throne. It is the thoughts of God, and His acts, we may add, towards man — His thoughts in goodness, the revelation of Him in Christ His Son. He approaches man according to that which He is and that which He wills in grace. God comes to him; it is the gospel of God. This is the true aspect: the gospel is never rightly understood until it is to us the gospel of God, the activity and revelation of His nature, and of His will in grace towards man.

Having pointed out the source, the Author of the gospel, the One whom it thus reveals in His grace, the apostle presents the connection between this gospel and the dealings of God which historically preceded it — its promulgation here below, and at the same time its own proper object; that is to say, its subject properly so called, and the place held with regard to it by that which preceded it (the order of things which those to whom they belonged sought to maintain as a substantive and independent system by rejecting the gospel). He here introduces that which preceded, not as a subject of controversy, but in its true character, to enforce the testimony of the gospel (anticipating objections, which are thus solved beforehand).

To the Gentile it was the revelation of the truth, and of God, in grace; to the Jew it was indeed that, while also putting everything that regarded him in its right place. The connection of the Old Testament with the gospel is this: the gospel of God had been announced beforehand by His prophets in holy writings. Observe here, that in these holy scriptures the gospel of God was not come, nor was it then addressed to men: but promised or announced beforehand, as to be sent. The assembly was not even announced: the gospel was announced, but as being yet to come.

Moreover, the subject of this gospel is, first of all, the Son of God. He has accomplished a work: but it is Himself who is the true subject of the gospel. Now He is presented in a twofold aspect: 1st, the object of the

promises, Son of David according to the flesh; 2nd, the Son of God in power, who, in the midst of sin, walked by the Spirit in divine and absolute holiness (resurrection being the illustrious and victorious proof of who He was, walking in this character). That is to say, resurrection is a public manifestation of that power by which He walked in absolute holiness during His life — a manifestation that He is the Son of God in power. He is clearly shown forth as Son of God in power by this means. Here it was no question of promise, but of power, of Him who could enter into conflict with the death in which man lay, and overcome it completely; and that, in connection with the holiness which bore testimony during His life to the power of that Spirit by which He walked, and in which He guarded Himself from being touched by sin. It was in the same power by which He was holy in life absolutely that He was raised from the dead.

In the ways of God on the earth He was the object and the fulfillment of the promises. With regard to the condition of man under sin and death, He was completely conqueror of all that stood in His way, whether living or in resurrection. It was the Son of God who was there, made known by resurrection according to the power that was in Him, a power that displayed itself according to the Spirit by the holiness in which He lived.\*

[\* This puts us, since it is for us, in connection with a holiness (as does the revelation of righteousness farther on, but there more openly) which implies connection with God as He is in Himself fully revealed — not like the Jews outside the veil.]

What marvelous grace to see the whole power of evil — that dreadful door of death which closed upon the sinful life of man, leaving him to the inevitable judgment that he deserved — broken, destroyed, by Him, who was willing to enter into the gloomy chamber it shut in, and take upon Himself all the weakness of man in death, and thus completely and absolutely deliver him whose penalty He had born in submitting to death! This victory over death, this deliverance of man from its dominion, by the power of the Son of God become man, when He had undergone it, and that as a sacrifice for sin, is the only ground of hope for mortal and sinful man. It sets aside all that sin and death have to say. It destroys, for him who has a portion in Christ, the seal of judgment upon sin, which is in death; and a new man, a new life, begins for him who had been held under it, outside the

whole scene, the whole effect of his former misery — a life founded on all the value of that which the Son of God had there accomplished.

In fine, we have, as the subject of the gospel, the Son of God, made of the seed of David after the flesh; and, in the bosom of humanity and of death, declared to be the Son of God in power by resurrection,\* Jesus Christ our Lord. The gospel was the gospel of God Himself; but it is by Jesus Christ the Lord that the apostle received his mission. He was the head of the work, and sent forth the laborers into the harvest which they were to reap in the world. The object of his mission, and its extent, was the obedience of faith (not obedience to the law) among an nations, establishing the authority and the value of the name of Christ. It was this name which should prevail and be acknowledged.

[\* It is not said “by His resurrection,” but “by resurrection” abstractly. His own was the great proof, but that of every man is a proof likewise.]

The apostle’s mission was not only his service; the being trusted with it was at the same time the personal grace and favor of Him whose testimony he bore. I am not speaking of salvation, although in Paul’s case the two things were identified — a fact that gave a remarkable color and energy to his mission; but there was grace and favor in the commission itself, and it is important to remember it. It gives character to the mission and to its execution. An angel performs a providential mission; a Moses details a law in the spirit of the law; a Jonah, a John the Baptist, preaches repentance, withdraws from the grace that appeared to falsify his threatenings against the wicked Gentiles, or in the wilderness lays the axe to the root of the unfruitful trees in God’s garden. But by Jesus, Paul, the bearer of the glad tidings of God, receives grace and apostleship. He carries, by grace and as grace, the message of grace to men wherever they may be, the grace which comes in all the largeness of the rights of God over men, and in Himself as sovereign, and in which He exercises His rights. Among these Gentiles, the believing Romans also were the called of Jesus Christ.

Paul therefore addresses all the believers in that great city. They were beloved of God, and saints by calling.\* He wishes them (as in all his epistles) grace and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, on whose part he delivered his message. The perfect grace of God by Christ, the perfect peace of man, and that with God; it was this which



he brought in the gospel and in his heart. These are the true conditions of God's relationship with man, and that of man with God, by the gospel — the ground on which Christianity places man. When an individual is addressed, another consideration comes in, namely, that of his own weaknesses and infirmities: therefore "mercy" is added to the wish of the sacred writers in the case of individuals. (See the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, and the Second Epistle of John.)\*

[\* The reader must take notice that, in verses 1 and 7, it is not "called to be an apostle," nor "called to be saints," but apostle by call, saints by call. They were the thing declared, and they were so by the call of God. A Jew was not holy by call; he was born holy, relatively to the Gentiles. These were the called of Jesus Christ; but they were not simply called to be holy, they were so by call.]

[\*\* The Epistle to Philemon might appear at first sight to be an exception; but it confirms this remark, for it will be seen that the assembly in his house is included in the wish. This makes the address of Jude the more remarkable. There is however a question of a various reading in Titus 1:4.]

If the love of God is in the heart, if He has His place there, it is before God that one is occupied with the objects of grace; and then, the work of God in them, the grace that has been displayed is the first thing that comes into the mind, whether in love or in thankfulness. The faith of the Romans ascends in thanksgivings from the heart of the apostle, whom the report of it had reached.

He then expresses his desire to see them, a desire that often occupied his mind. Here he brings out his apostolic relationship towards them, with all the tenderness and all the delicacy that belong to the grace and the love which had formed this relationship and which constituted its strength. He is apostle by right to all the Gentiles, even although he may not have seen them; but in heart he is their servant; and with the most true and ardent brotherly love, flowing from the grace that had made him apostle, he desires to see them, that he might impart to them some spiritual gift, which his apostleship put him in a position to communicate. What he had in his heart in this was, that he might enjoy the faith which was common to him and to them — faith strengthened by these gifts — for their mutual comfort. Often he had purposed coming, that he might have some fruit in this part also of the field which God had committed to him; but he had been hindered until now.

He then declares himself a debtor to all the Gentiles, and ready, as far as in him lay, to preach the gospel to those of Rome also. The way in which the apostle claims the whole field of the Gentiles as his own, and in which he was prevented by God from going to Rome until he arrived there at the end of his career (and then only as a prisoner), is worthy of all attention.

However it might be, he was ready, and that because of the value of the gospel — a point which leads him to state both the value and the character of this gospel. For, he says, he was not ashamed of it. It was the power of God to salvation. Observe here the way in which the apostle presents everything as coming from God. It is the gospel of God, the power of God to salvation, the righteousness of God, and even the wrath of God, and that from heaven — a different thing from earthly chastisement. This is the key to everything. The apostle lays stress upon it, putting it forward from the commencement of the epistle; for man ever inclines to have confidence in himself, to boast of himself, to seek for some merit — some righteousness, in himself, to Judaize, to be occupied with himself, as though he could do something. It was the apostle's joy to put his God forward.

Thus, in the gospel, God intervened, accomplishing a salvation which was entirely His own work — a salvation of which He was the source and power, and which He Himself had wrought. Man came into it by faith: it was the believer who shared it, but to have part in it by faith was exactly the way to share it without adding anything whatsoever to it, and to leave it wholly the salvation of God. God be praised that it is so, whether for righteousness or for power, or for the whole result; for thus it is perfect, divine. God has come in, in His almighty power and in His love, to deliver the wretched, according to His own might. The gospel is the expression of this: one believes it and one shares it.

But there is an especial reason why it is the power of God in salvation. Man had departed from God by sin. Righteousness alone could bring him back into the presence of God, and make him such that he could be there in peace. A sinner, he had no righteousness, but quite the contrary; and if man were to come before God as a sinner, judgment necessarily awaits him: righteousness would be displayed in this way. But, in the gospel, God reveals a positive righteousness on His part. If man has none, God

has a righteousness which belongs to Him, which is His own, perfect like Himself, according to His own heart. Such a righteousness as this is revealed in the gospel. Human righteousness there was none: a righteousness of God is revealed. It is all-perfect in itself, divine and complete. To be revealed, it must be so. The gospel proclaims it to us.

The principle on which it is announced is faith, because it exists, and it is divine. If man wrought at it, or performed a part of it, or if his heart had any share in carrying it out, it would not be the righteousness of God; but it is entirely and absolutely His. We believe in the gospel that reveals it. But if it is the believer who participates in it, every one who has faith has part in it. This righteousness is on the principle of faith. It is revealed, and consequently to faith, wherever that faith exists.

This is the force of the expression which is translated “from faith to faith” — on the principle of faith unto faith. Now the importance of this principle is evident here. It admits every believing Gentile on the same footing as the Jew, who has no other right of entrance than he. They both have faith: the gospel recognises no other means of participating in it. The righteousness is that of God; the Jew is nothing more in it than the Gentile. As it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” The scriptures of the Jews testified to the truth of the apostle’s principle.

This is what the gospel announced on God’s part to man. The primary subject was the Person of Christ, son of David according to flesh (accomplishment of promise); and the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness. But the righteousness of God (not of man) was revealed in it. This is the grand theme of all that follows. The apostle had indeed reason not to be ashamed of it, despised as it was by men.

But this doctrine was confirmed by another consideration, and was based on the great truth contained in it. God, in presenting Himself, could not look at things according to the partial communications adapted to the ignorance of men, and to the temporary dispensations by which He governed them. Wrath was not merely His intervention in government, as by the Assyrian or Babylonish captivity. It was “wrath from heaven.” The essential opposition of His nature to evil, and penal rejection of it wherever it was found, was manifested. Now God manifested Himself in the gospel. Thus divine wrath does not break forth indeed (for grace

proclaimed the righteousness of God in salvation for sinners who should believe) but it is revealed (not exactly in the gospel — that is the revelation of righteousness; but it is revealed) from heaven against ungodliness — all that does not respect the presence of God — against all that does not comport with the presence of God, and against all unrighteousness or iniquity in those who possessed the truth but still dishonored God; that is to say, against all men, Gentile or otherwise, and particularly the Jews who had the knowledge of God according to the law; and, again (for the principle is universal, and flows from that which God is, when He reveals Himself), against every one who professes Christianity, when he walks in the evil that God hates.

This wrath, divine wrath, according to God's nature as in heaven, against man as a sinner, made God's righteousness necessary. Man was now to meet God fully revealed as He is. This showed him wholly a sinner, but paved the way in grace for a far more excellent place and standing — one based on the righteousness of God. The gospel reveals the righteousness: its opportuneness and necessity are demonstrated by the state of sin in which all men are, and by occasion of which wrath was revealed from heaven. Man was not merely to be governed by God, and find governmental wrath, but to appear before God. How could we stand there? The answer is the revelation of God's righteousness by the gospel. Hence, too, even in speaking of resurrection Christ is declared to be the Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness. God has to be met such as He is. The revelation of God Himself in His holy nature went necessarily farther than mere Jews. It was against the thing sin, wherever it was, wherever it met sin, to make good what God is. It is a glorious truth; and how blessed that thus divine righteousness in sovereign grace should be revealed! And, God being love, we can say that it could not be otherwise; but how glorious to have God thus revealed!

The thesis of the epistle then is in verse 17, that which proved its need in verse 18. From verse 19 to the end of verse 20 in chapter 3, the condition of men, Jews and Gentiles, to whom this truth applies, is given in detail, in order to show in what way this wrath was deserved, and all were shut up in sin (v. 19 and 21 of this chapter giving the leading principles of the evil as regards the Gentiles). From verse 21 to 31 of chapter 3, the answer in grace by the righteousness of God, through the blood of Christ, is briefly

but powerfully declared. For we first get the answer by Christ's blood to the old state, and then the introduction, by death and life through Christ, into the new.

The apostle begins with the Gentiles — "all ungodliness" of men. I say the Gentiles (it is evident that if a Jew falls into it, this guilt attaches to him; but the condition described, as far as chapter 2:17, is that of Gentiles); afterwards that of the Jews, to chapter 3:20.

**CHAPTER** 1:18 is the thesis of the whole argument from verse 19 to chapter 3:20, this part of the epistle showing the ground of that wrath.

The Gentiles are without excuse on two accounts. First, that which may be known of God has been manifested by creation — His power and His Godhead. This proof has existed since the creation of the world. Secondly, that, having the knowledge of God as Noah had it, they had not glorified Him as God, but in the vanity of their imaginations, reasoning upon their own thoughts on this subject and the ideas it produced in their own minds, they became fools while professing themselves to be wise, and fell into idolatry, and that of the grossest kind. Now God has judged this. If they would not retain a just thought of the glory of God, they should not even retain a just idea of the natural honor of man. They should dishonor themselves as they had dishonored God. It is the exact description, in a few strong and energetic words, of the whole pagan mythology. They had not discernment, moral taste, to retain God in their knowledge: God gave them up to a spirit void of discernment, to boast themselves in depraved tastes, in things unbecoming nature itself. The natural conscience knew that God judged such things to be worthy of death according to the just exigencies of His nature. Nevertheless they not only did them, but they took pleasure in those who did them, when their own lusts did not carry them away. And this left no excuse for those who judged the evil (and there were such), for they committed it while judging it. Man then by judging condemned himself doubly: for by judging he showed that he knew it to be evil, and yet he did it. But the judgment of God is according to truth against those who commit such things: they who acquired credit by judging them should not escape it.

Two things are presented here with respect to God; His judgment against evil — the evil-doer shall not escape (the real difference of right and wrong

would be maintained by judgment); and His mercy, patience, and long-suffering with regard to the evil-doer — His goodness inviting him to repentance. He who continued in evil deceived himself by trying to forget the sure judgment of God and by despising His goodness. The consequences, both of a life opposed to God and to His truth on the one hand, and of the search after that which is pleasing to Him, and thereby for eternal life on the other, were sure — tribulation and anguish in the one case, in the other glory and honor; and that without more respect to the Jews than to the Gentiles.

God judged things according to their true moral character, and according to the advantages which the guilty one had enjoyed.\* Those who had sinned without law should perish without law, and those who had sinned under the law should be judged according to the law, in the day when God should judge the secrets of the heart according to the gospel which Paul preached. This character of the judgment is very important. It is not the government of the world by an earthly and outward judgment, as the Jew understood it, but that of the individual according to God's knowledge of the heart.

[\* How strikingly this also brings out what so breaks everywhere through the doctrine of this epistle that everything is according to its reality before God, God being revealed through Christ and the cross. All must take its true character and result according to what He was. Note moreover that the terms suppose gospel knowledge — "seek for glory, honor, and incorruptibility." These are known by Christianity.]

Also God would have realities. The Gentile who fulfilled the law was better than a Jew who broke it. If he called himself a Jew and acted ill (chap. 2:17), he only dishonored God, and caused His name to be blasphemed among the Gentiles whilst boasting in his privileges. He then enlarges on the point that God requires moral reality, and that a Gentile who did that which the law demanded was better worth than a Jew who disobeyed it, and that the real Jew was he who had the law in his heart, being circumcised also in the spirit, and not he who had only outward circumcision. This was a condition which God could praise, and not man only.

**CHAPTER 3.** Having established the great truth that God required real moral goodness, he considers the position of the Jews. Could they not plead special divine favor? Was there no advantage in Judaism? Surely there was,

especially in that they possessed the oracles of God. The ways of God were full of blessing in themselves, although that did not change the immutable truths of His nature. And if many among them had been unbelieving, this did not alter the faithfulness of God; and the fact that the unbelief of many did but the more demonstrate the faithfulness of God, who remained the same whatever they might be, took nothing from the claims of righteousness. Unbelievers should be punished according to what they were; it would but magnify the unfailing faithfulness of God, which never failed, however unavailing it might be for the mass of the nation. Otherwise He could judge no one, not even the world (which the Jew was willing to see judged); for the condition of the world also enhanced and put in evidence the faithfulness of God towards His people. If then the Jew had advantages, was he therefore better? In no wise: all were shut up under sin, whether Jew or Gentile, as God had already declared.\*

[\* Note here a very important principle, that there are positive advantages of position, where there is no intrinsic change. Compare chapter 11:17, and 1 Corinthians 10.]

The apostle now cites the Old Testament to prove this with regard to the Jews, who did not deny it with regard to the Gentiles which he had already also shown. The law, says he, belongs to you. You boast that it refers to you exclusively. Be it so: hear then what it says of the people, of yourselves. It speaks to you, as you acknowledge. There is not then one righteous man among you on whom God can look down from heaven. He quotes Psalm 14:2, 3; Isaiah 59:7, 8, to set forth the judgment pronounced on them by those oracles of which they boasted. Thus every mouth was shut, and all the world guilty before God. Therefore it is that no flesh can be justified before God by the law; for if the world in the midst of darkness wallowed in sin, by means of the law sin was known.

But now, without law, apart from all law, a righteousness that is of God has been manifested, the law and the prophets bearing witness to it.

Hence then we find not only the condition of the Gentiles and of the Jews set forth, together with the great immutable principles of good and evil, whatever might be the dealings of God, but the effect of the law itself, and that which was introduced by Christianity as regarded righteousness, altogether outside the law, although the law and the prophets bore witness to it. In a word, the eternal truth as to sin and as to the responsibility of

man, the effect of the law, the connection of the Old Testament with Christianity, the true character of the latter in that which relates to righteousness (namely, that it is a thing entirely new and independent), the righteousness of God Himself — the whole question between man and God, with regard to sin and righteousness, is settled, as to its foundation, in these few words. The manner of its accomplishment is now to be treated of.\*

[\* Chapter 3:21 reverts in fact to chapter 1:17; what comes between is the demonstration of the ground of chapter 1:18, which made the righteousness of verse 17 imperatively necessary.]

It is the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ. Man has not accomplished it, man has not procured it. It is of God, it is His righteousness; by believing in Jesus Christ participation in it is obtained. Had it been a human righteousness, it would have been by the law which is the rule of that righteousness — a law given to the Jews only. But being the righteousness of God Himself, it had reference to all; its range embraced not the one more than the other. It was the righteousness of God “unto all.” A Jew was not more in relation with the righteousness of God than a Gentile. It was in fact universal in its aspect and in its applicability. A righteousness of God for man, because no man had any for God, it was applied to all those who believe in Jesus. Wherever there was faith, there it was applied. The believer possessed it. It was towards all, and upon all those who believed in Jesus. For there was no difference: all had sinned, and outside the glory of God,\* deprived of that glory, were justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Whether a Jew or a Gentile, it was a sinful man: the righteousness was the righteousness of God; the goodness of God was that which bestowed it, redemption in Christ Jesus the divine means of having part in it.\*\*

[\* Remark here how, God being revealed, sin is measured by the glory of God. We are so used to read this that we overlook its force. How strange to say, “and come short of the glory of God!” Man might say, Why, of course we have; but, morally speaking, this has been revealed, and if one cannot stand before it, according to it, we cannot subsist before God at all. Of course it is not of His essential glory — all creatures are short of that, of course — but of that which was fitting for, according to, could stand in, His presence. If we cannot stand there, fitly “walk in the light as God is in the light,” we cannot be with God at all. There is no veil now.]



[\*\* To show how complete is this instruction of Paul's, I give here a summary of its elements. In itself it is the righteousness of God, without law, the law and the prophets bearing witness to it: as to its application, the righteousness of God by faith in Christ Jesus unto all, and upon all them that believe. Christ is proposed as the propitiatory by faith in His blood, to show forth this righteousness by the remission of past sins (of the Abrahams, etc.) according to the forbearance of God; but to show it forth in the present time, in order that He may be just, and justify those who believe in Jesus.]

Before the accomplishment of this redemption, God, in view of it, had in patience born with the faithful, and His righteousness in forgiving them was now clearly manifested. But, further, the righteousness itself was manifested: we come to Christ as a propitiatory that God has set forth before men, and we find on it the blood which gives us free access to God in righteousness, God whose glory is satisfied in the work that Christ Jesus has accomplished, His blood upon the mercy-seat bearing witness thereof. It is no longer "forbearance" — righteousness is manifested, so that God is seen to be righteous and just in justifying him who is of faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? For the Jews boasted much in reference to the Gentiles — self-righteousness always boasts: it is not a law of works that can shut it out. Man justifying himself by his works would have something to boast in. It is this law of faith, this divine principle on which we are placed, which shuts it out: for it is by the work of another, without works of law, that we through grace have part in divine righteousness, having none of our own.

And is God a limited God\* the God of the Jews only? No, He is also the God of the Gentiles. And how? In grace: in that it is one God who justifies the Jews (who seek after righteousness) on the principle of faith, and — since justification is on the principle of faith — the believing Gentiles also by faith. Men are justified by faith; the believing Gentile then is justified. With regard to the Jew, it is the principle which is established (for they were seeking the righteousness). With regard to the Gentile, since faith existed in the case supposed, he was justified, for justification was on that principle.

[\* See here again how God is brought out in Himself. Compare Matthew 15:19-28.]

Is it then that faith overturned the authority of law? By no means. It established completely the authority of law; but it made man participate in

divine righteousness, while acknowledging his just and total condemnation by the law when under it — a condemnation which made another righteousness necessary, since according to the law man had none — had none of his own. The law demanded righteousness, but it showed sin was there. If righteousness which it demanded had not been necessary, when it failed to produce it in man, there was no need of another. Now faith affirmed this need and the validity of man's condemnation under law, by making the believer participate in this other righteousness, which is that of God. That which the law demanded it did not give; and even, because it demanded it, man failed to produce it. To have given it would have effaced the obligation. God acts in grace, when the obligation of the law is fully maintained in condemnation. He gives righteousness, because it must be had. He does not efface the obligation of the law, according to which man is totally condemned;\* but, while recognising and affirming the justice of that condemnation, He glorifies Himself in grace by granting a divine righteousness to man, when he had no human righteousness to present before God in connection with the obligations imposed on him by the law. Nothing ever put divine sanction on the law like the death of Christ, who bore its curse, but did not leave us under it. Faith does not then annul law; it fully establishes its authority. It shows man righteously condemned under it, and maintains the authority of the law in that condemnation, for it holds all who are under it to be under the curse.\*\*

[\* The law is the perfect rule of right and wrong for every child of Adam in itself, though only given to the Jews. But it was not arbitrary. It took up all the relationships in which men stood, gave a perfect rule as to them, and the sanction of God's authority to them, with a penal sanction. But now we have something much higher, not what man ought to be, but God Himself glorified.]

[\*\* Hence those who put Christians under law do not maintain its authority; for they hold them exempt from its curse, though they break it.]

The reader will remark that what is distinctly set forth to the end of this third chapter is the blood of Christ as applying itself to the sins of the old man, hence making forgiving a righteous thing, and the believer clear from sins, because cleared by Christ's blood. This met all the guilt of the old man.

We now enter on another aspect of that which justifies, but still proves sins; not yet, however, putting us in a new place — that of resurrection, in connection with, and consequent on, this.

**CHAPTER 4.** In dealing with the Jew, and even in dealing with the question of righteousness, there was, besides the law, another consideration of great weight both with the Jews themselves and in the dealings of God. What of Abraham, called of God to be the parent-stock, the father of the faithful? The apostle, therefore, after having set forth the relation in which faith stood towards the law by the introduction of the righteousness of God, takes up the question of the ground on which Abraham was placed as well-pleasing to God in righteousness. For the Jew might have admitted his personal failure under the law, and pleaded the enjoyment of privilege under Abraham. If we consider him then thus according to the flesh (that is, in connection with the privileges that descended from him as inheritance for his children) and take our place under him in the line of succession to enjoy those privileges, on what principle does this set us? On the same principle of faith. He would have had something to boast of if he was justified by works; but before God it was not so. For the scriptures say, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not counted of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him who justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” For thereby, in fact, he glorifies God in the way that God desires to be glorified, and according to the revelation He has made of Himself in Christ.

Thus the testimony born by Abraham’s case is to justification by faith. David also supports this testimony and speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom righteousness is imputed without works. He whose iniquities are pardoned, whose sins are covered, to whom the Lord does not impute sin — he is the man whom David calls blessed. But this supposed man to be a sinner and not righteous in himself. It was a question of what God was in grace to such a one, and not of what he was to God, or rather when he was a sinner. His blessedness was that God did not impute to him the sins he had committed, not that he was righteous in himself before God. Righteousness for man was found in the grace of God. Here it is identified with non-imputation of sins to man, guilty through committing them. No sin is imputed.

Was then this righteousness for the circumcision only? Now our thesis is, that God counted Abraham to be righteous by faith. But was he circumcised when this took place? Not so; he was uncircumcised. Righteousness then is by faith, and for the uncircumcised through faith — a testimony that was overwhelming to a Jew, because Abraham was the beau ideal to which all his ideas of excellence and of privilege referred. Circumcision was only a seal to the righteousness by faith which Abraham possessed in uncircumcision, that he might be the father of all believers who were in the same state of uncircumcision, that righteousness might be imputed to them also; and the father of circumcision — that is, the first model of a people truly set apart for God — not only with regard to the circumcised, but to all those who should walk in the steps of his faith when uncircumcised. For, after all, the promise that he should be heir of the world was not made to Abraham nor to his seed in connection with the law, but with righteousness by faith. For if they who are on the principle of law are heirs, the faith by which Abraham received it is vain, and the promise made of none effect;\* for, on the contrary, the law produces wrath — and that is a very different thing from bringing into the enjoyment of a promise — for where there is no law there is no transgression. Observe, he does not say there is no sin; but where there is no commandment, there is none to violate. Now, the law being given to a sinner, wrath is necessarily the consequence of its imposition.

[\* The careful reader of Paul's epistles must attend to the use of this word "for." In very many cases it does not express an inference, but turns to some collateral subject which, in the apostle's mind, would lead to the same conclusion, or some deeper general principle, which lay at the groundwork of the argument, enlarging the sphere of vision in things connected with it.]

This is the negative side of the subject. The apostle shows that with regard to the Jews themselves, the inheritance could not be on the principle of law without setting Abraham aside, for to him the inheritance had been given by promise, and this implied that it was by faith: for we believe in a promise, we do not ourselves fulfill a promise that has been made to us. Accordingly the righteousness of Abraham was — according to scripture — through this same faith. It was imputed to him for righteousness.

This principle admitted the Gentiles; but here it is established with regard to the Jews themselves or rather with regard to the ways of God, in such a manner as to exclude the law as a means of obtaining the inheritance of

God. The consequence with regard to Gentiles believing the gospel is stated in verse 16, “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace, to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed” of Abraham to whom the promise was made; not to that only which was under the law, but to all that had the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all before God, as it is written, “I have made thee a father of many nations.”

Thus we have the great principle established. It is by faith, before and without law;\* and the promise is made to man in uncircumcision, and he is justified by believing it.

[\* Lit. “apart from law,” which had nothing to do with it.]

Another element is now introduced. Humanly speaking, the fulfillment of the promise was impossible, for in that respect both Abraham and Sarah were as dead, and the promise must be believed in against all hope, resting on the almighty power of Him who raises the dead, and calls things that are not as though they were. This was Abraham’s faith. He believed the promise that he should be the father of many nations, because God had spoken, counting on the power of God, thus glorifying Him, without calling in question anything that He had said by looking at circumstances; therefore this also was counted to him for righteousness. He glorified God according to what God was. Now, this was not written for his sake alone the same faith shall be imputed to us also for righteousness — faith in God as having raised up Jesus from the dead. It is not here faith in Jesus, but in Him who came in power into the domain of death, where Jesus lay because of our sins, and brought Him forth by His power, the mighty activity of the love of God who brought Him — who had already born all the punishment of our sins — out from under all their consequences; so that, by believing God who has done this, we embrace the whole extent of His work, the grace and the power displayed in it; and we thus know God. Our God is the God who has done this. He has Himself raised up Jesus from among the dead, who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. Our sins were already upon Him. The active intervention of God delivered Him who lay in death because He had born them. It is not only a resurrection of the dead, but from among the dead — the intervention of God to bring forth in righteousness the One who had glorified Him. By believing in such a God we understand that it is Himself who, in raising Christ from among the dead, has delivered us Himself from

all that our sins had subjected us to; because He has brought back in delivering power Him who underwent it for our sakes.

Thus, being justified by faith, we have peace with God. Remark here also the difference of Abraham's faith and ours. He believed God could perform what He promised. We are called to believe He has performed. Faith in God's word, believing God, and this faith laying hold on His power in resurrection, is faith that this has lifted us out\* of the whole effect of our sins. It reposes in God's power as having wrought this deliverance for us, and justified us therein. Christ has been delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification.\*\*

[\* Not that the body of course is yet renewed.]

[\*\* I reject entirely the interpretation "because we have been justified." It is not the force of the Greek, and by excluding faith from our being justified contradicts the beginning of chapter 5.]

The apostle had established the great principles. He comes now to the source and application of all (that is to say, their application to the condition of the soul in its own feelings). He sets before us the effect of these truths when received by faith through the power of the Holy Ghost. The work is done; the believer has part in it, and is justified. Having been justified, we have peace with God, we stand in divine favor, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. We believe in a God who has intervened in power to raise Him from the dead who had born our offenses, and who, being raised, is the eternal witness that our sins are put away, and that the only true God is He who has done it in love. I have then peace with Him; all my sins are blotted outannulled — by the work of Christ; my unburdened heart knows the Savior God. I stand as a present thing in that grace or favor, God's blessed present favor resting on me, which is better than life. Through Christ, entered into His presence, I am even now in the enjoyment of His favor, in present grace. All the fruits of the old man are cancelled before God by the death of Christ. There cannot be a question as to my sins between me and God. He has nothing to impute to methat has been all settled in Christ's death and resurrection. As to the present time, I am brought into His presence in the enjoyment of His favor. Grace characterises my present relationship with God. Further, all my sins having been put away according to the requirements of God's glory, and Christ being risen from the dead, having met all that glory, I rejoice in the

hope of the glory of God It is a full well-grounded hope of being in it, not a coming short of it. All is connected with God Himself, with, and according to, His perfections, the favor of God, and His glory for our hope. All is connected with His power in resurrection — peace with God already settled, the present favor of God, and the hope of glory.

Remark here that justification is distinct from peace. “Having been justified, we have peace.” Justification is my true state before God, by virtue of the work of Christ, of His death, and of resurrection. Faith, thus knowing God, is at peace with God; but this is a result, like the present enjoyment of the grace wherein we stand. Faith believes in the God who has done this, and who — exercising His power in love and in righteousness — has raised from the dead the One who bore my sins, having entirely abolished them, and having perfectly glorified God in so doing. On this ground, too, “by Him” we have found access into the full favor of God in which we stand. And what is the result? It is glory; we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. It is God who is the root and the accomplisher of all. It is the gospel of God, the power of God in salvation, the righteousness of God, and it is into the glory of God that we are introduced in hope. Such is the efficacy of this grace with regard to us; it is peace, grace or favor, glory. One would say, This is all we can have: the past, present, and future are provided for.

Nevertheless there is more. First, practical experience. We pass in fact through tribulations; but we rejoice in this, because it exercises the heart, detaches us from the world, subdues the will, the natural working of the heart, purifies it from those things which dim our hope by filling it with present things, in order that we may refer more to God in all things, which, after all, are entirely directed by Him whose faithful grace ministered all this to us. We learn better that the scene in which we move passes away and changes, and is but a place of exercise, and not the proper sphere of life. Thus hope, founded on the work of Christ, becomes more clear, more disentangled from the mixture of that which is of man here below; we discern more clearly that which is unseen and eternal, and the links of the soul are more complete and entire with that which is on before us.

Experience, which might have discouraged nature, works hope, because, come what may, we have the key to all, because the love of God who has given us this hope, made clearer by these exercises, is shed abroad in our

hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us, who is the God of love dwelling in us.

Nevertheless, while giving this inward foundation of joy, the Spirit is careful to refer it to God, and to what He has done outside us, as regards the proof we have of it, in order that the soul may be built upon that which is in Him, and not on that which is in ourselves. This love is indeed in us; it sweetly explains all; but the love which is there through the presence of the Holy Ghost is the love of God, proved, namely, in that when we were destitute of all strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. The due time was when man had been demonstrated to be ungodly, and without strength to come out of this condition, although God, under the law, showed him the way. Man can devote himself when he has an adequate motive; God has displayed the love that was peculiar\* to Himself, in that, when there was no motive for Him in us, when we were nothing but sinners, Christ died for us! The source was in Himself, or rather was Himself. What a joy to know that it is in Him and of Him that we have all these things!

[\* The word is emphatic in the original, His own love, v. 8.]

God, then, having reconciled us to Himself according to the prompting of His own heart, when we were enemies, will much more, now that we are justified, go on to the end; and we shall be saved from wrath through Christ. Accordingly he adds, speaking of the means, "If we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son," by that which was, so to speak, His weakness, "much more shall we be saved by his life," the mighty energy in which He lives eternally. Thus the love of God makes peace with regard to that which we were, and gives us security with regard to our future, making us happy withal in the present. And it is that which God is that secures to us all these blessings. He is lovefull of consideration for us, full of wisdom.

But there is a second "not only," after our state — peace, grace, and glory — what seemed complete and is complete salvation, had been established. "Not only" do we joy in tribulation, but we joy in God. We glory in Himself. This is the second part of the Christian's blessed experience of the joy which results from our knowledge of God's love in Christ, and our reconciliation by Him. The first was that he gloried in tribulation because



of its effect, divine love being known The second is the love of God Himself in man. This known, we glory, not only in our salvation, and even in tribulation, but knowing such a Savior God (a God who has raised up Jesus from the dead, and has saved us in His love), we glory in Him. Higher joy than this we cannot have.

This closes this section of the epistle, in which, through the propitiation made by Christ, the putting away of our sins, and the love of God Himself, has been fully made good and revealed: peace, grace possessed, and glory in hope; and that by the pure love of God Himself known in Christ's dying for sinners. It is purely of God and thus divinely perfect. It was no matter of experience, whatever joy flowed from it, but God's own acting from Himself, and so revealing Himself in what He is. Up to this, sins and personal guilt are treated of; now, sin and the state of the race. The pure favor of God towards us, beginning with us as sinners, is wonderfully brought out, going on to our rejoicing in Himself who has been, and is, such to us.

Having given the foundation and the source of salvation, and the confidence and enjoyment that flow from it, having based all on God, who had to do with those who were nothing but sinners devoid of all strength, and that by the death of Christ, the question of our sins was settled — that for which each man would have had to be judged according to what each had respectively done. Lawless, or under law, all were guilty; a propitiatory, or mercy-seat, was set forth in the precious blood of Christ, peace made for the guilty, and God revealed in love. But this has carried us up higher. We have to do with God, and man as he is as a present thing. It is a question of sinful man; the Jew had no privilege here, he had nothing to boast of. He could not say, sin came in by us and by the law. It is man, sin, and grace that are in question. The apostle takes up this fundamental and essential question — not sins and guilt to be judged of hereafter if not repented of, but the present state of man.

Man had nothing to boast of either. The God of grace is before our eyes, acting with regard to sin, when there was nothing else, save that law had aggravated the case by transgressions. Now sin came in by one man, and by sin death. This brings us to the condition of the race, not merely the acts of the individuals. That condition was exclusion from God, and an evil

nature. All were alike in it, though surely each had added his own personal sins and guilt. Sin had come in by one, and death by sin. And thus death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. For sin was in the world before the law. Nor did the law add much to the advantage of man's condition; it definitively imputed\* his sin to him by giving him knowledge of it and forbidding it. Nevertheless, although there had been no imputation according to the government of God in virtue of an imposed and known rule, yet death reigned — a constant proof of sin (moreover, the history of Genesis made all this incontestable, even to the Jew) over those who had not broken a covenant founded on a known commandment, as Adam\*\* had done; and the Jews also, after the law was given. Men, between Adam and Moses, when there was no question of a law, as there was both before and after that interval, died just the same — sin reigned.

[\* The word “imputed” in this passage (chap. 5:13) is not the same as righteousness imputed, or faith imputed for righteousness. It means an act (or sum) put to the account of another, not esteeming the person to be such or such.]

[\*\* This is a quotation from Hosea 6:7 according to its true sense, which accuses Israel of having done the same thing as Adam. “But they, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant.”

We must observe here that from the end of verse 12 to that of 17 is a parenthesis: only the idea is developed, as in similar cases. In the parenthesis the apostle, after having presented Adam as the figure of Him who was to come — of Christ, argues that the character of the gift cannot be inferior to that of the evil. If the sin of the one first man was not confined in its effects to him who committed it, but extended to all those who as a race were connected with him, with much greater reason shall the grace which is by one, Christ Jesus, not end in Him, but embrace the many under Him also. And with regard to the thing, as well as to the person — and here the law is in view one single offense brought in death, but grace remits a multitude of offenses. Thus it could suffice for that which the law had made necessary. And, as to the effect, death has reigned; but by grace, not only shall life reign, but we shall reign in life by One according to the abundance of grace — by Jesus Christ.

In verse 18 the general argument is resumed in a very abstract way. “By one offense,” he says, “towards all for condemnation, even so by one accomplished righteousness (or act of righteousness) towards all men, for

justification of life.” One offense bore — in its bearing, so to speak, referred to all, and so it was with the one act of righteousness. This is the scope of the action in itself. Now for the application: for as by the disobedience of one man (only) many are constituted sinners, so by the obedience of one (only) many are constituted righteous. It is still the thought that the act of the individual is not confined, as to its effects, within the limits of his own person. It affects many others, bringing them under the consequences of that act. It is said “all,” when the scope of the action\* is spoken of; “the many,” when it is the definitive effect with regard to men; that is, the “many” who were in connection with him who accomplished the act.

[\* The same distinction, with the same difference in the preposition, is found in connection with the righteousness of God, when the apostle speaks of the efficacy of the blood: only he points out who the many are, because the object of faith is presented rather than the efficacy of the work, although this is supposed, chapter 3:22 “righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ towards all and upon all those who believe”; unto all, and upon all believers. So here it was by one offense “towards all,” and then the many connected with Christ are constituted righteous by His obedience.]

This then was outside the law, though the law might aggravate the evil. It was a question of the effect of the acts of Adam and of Christ, and not of the conduct of individuals, to which evidently the law related. It is by one man’s disobedience the many (all men) were made sinners, not by their own sins. Of sins each has his own: here it is a state of sin common to all. Of what use then was the law? It came in, as it were, exceptionally, and accessory to the chief fact, “that the offense\* might abound.” But not only where the offense, but where sin abounded — for under the law and without the law it has abounded — grace has superabounded; in order that, as sin has reigned in death, grace should reign through righteousness in eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord. If where sin reigns righteousness had reigned, it would have been to condemn the whole world. It is grace that reigns — the sovereign love of God. Righteousness is on a level with the evil, when it deals with evil, by the fact that it is righteousness; but God is above it, and acts, and can act — has a right to act — according to His own nature; and He is love. Is it that He sanctions unrighteousness and sin? No, in His love He brings about the accomplishment of divine righteousness by Jesus Christ. He has accomplished in Him that divine righteousness in raising Him to His right hand. But this is in virtue of a work wrought for

us, in which He has glorified God. Thus He is our righteousness, we the righteousness of God in Him. It is the righteousness of faith, for we have it by believing in Him. It is love which — taking the character of grace when sin is in question — reigns, and gives eternal life above and beyond death — life that comes from above and ascends thither again; and that in divine righteousness, and in connection with that righteousness, magnifying it and manifesting it through the work of Jesus Christ, in whom we have this life, when He had wrought what brought out divine righteousness, in order that we might possess eternal life and glory according to it. If grace reigns, it is God who reigns. That righteousness should be maintained is that which His nature required. But it is more than maintained according to the measure of the claim God had on man as such. Christ was perfect surely as man; but He has glorified what God is Himself, and, He being raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, God has glorified His righteousness by setting Him at His right hand, as He did His love in giving Him. It is now righteousness in salvation given by grace to those who possessed none — given in Jesus, who by His work laid the full ground for it in glorifying God with regard even to sin, in the place where in this respect all that God is has been displayed.

[\* Not sin. Sin was already there; the law made each of its motions a positive offense.]

The fulfillment of the law would have been man's righteousness: man might have gloried in it. Christ has glorified God — a most weighty point in connection with righteousness, connecting it withal with glory. And grace imparts this to the sinner by imputation, accounting him righteous according to it, introducing him in the glory which Christ merited by His work — the glory in which He was as Son before the world began.

But alas! in this glorious redemption accomplished by grace, which substitutes the righteousness of God and the person of the second Adam for the sin and the person of the first, the perversity of the flesh can find occasion for the sin which it loves, or at least to charge the doctrine with it. If it is by the obedience of One that I am constituted righteous, and because grace superabounds, let us sin that it may abound: that does not touch this righteousness, and only glorifies this superabundance of grace. Is this the apostle's doctrine? or a legitimate consequence of his doctrine? In no wise. The doctrine is, that we are brought into God's presence

through death, in virtue of the work which Christ therein accomplished, and by having a part in that death. Can we live in the sin to which we are dead? It is to contradict oneself in one's own words. But, being baptised unto Christ (in His name, to have part with Him, according to the truth contained in the revelation we have of Him), I am baptised to have part in His death for through this it is that I have this righteousness in which He appears before God, and I in Him. But it is to sin that He has died. He has done with it for ever. When He died, He who knew no sin came out of that condition of life in flesh and blood, to which in us sin attached, in which we were sinners; and in which He the sinless One, in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sacrifice for sin, was made sin for us.\* We have then been buried with Him by baptism for death (v. 4), having part in it, entering into it by baptism which represents it, in order that, as Christ was raised up from among the dead by the glory of the Father, we also should walk in newness of life. In a word I am brought into the participation of this divine and perfect righteousness by having part in death unto sin; it is impossible therefore that it should be to live in it. Here it is not duty that is spoken of, but the nature of the thing. I cannot die to a thing in order to live in it. The doctrine itself refutes as absolute nonsense the argument of the flesh, which under the pretense of righteousness will not recognise our need of grace.\*\*

[\* This does not refer simply to bearing our sins: that is the subject of the first part of the epistle. The condition in which we were, as a whole race, was that of fallen sinful Adam. Christ the sinless One came and stood for us and God's glory substitutively; that is, as a sacrifice in that place, He was made sin, underwent the forsaking of God, and, glorifying God, died in and to the place, to the whole condition of being, in which we were, and in which, as made sin, He stood for us before God. This work, though done as and for man, I doubt not, goes farther than our salvation. He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. He takes away, as God's Lamb, the sin of the world. His sacrifice is the basis of the condition of that new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.]

[\*\* Note, we are not here viewed as risen with Christ; the believer being always viewed here, as I have said, as being on the earth, though alive in Christ and justified, it is used as a ground for practice and walk here.]

The character of this new life, into which the resurrection of Christ has brought us, is presented here in a striking way. Christ had perfectly glorified God in dying; also even in dying was He the Son of the living God. It is not all, therefore, that He could not be holden of it, true as that

is because of His Person; His resurrection was also a necessity of the glory of God the Father. All that was in God was compelled to do it by His glory itself (even as Christ had glorified all), His justice. His love, His truth, His power; His glory, in that He could not low death to have the victory over the One who was faithful; His relationship as Father, who ought not, could not, leave His Son in bondage to the fruit of sin and to the power of the enemy. It was due to Christ on the part of God, due to His own glory as God and Father, necessary also, in order to show the reflex of His own glory, to manifest it according to His counsels, and that in man. Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. All that the Father is came into it, engaged to give Jesus the triumph of resurrection, of victory over death, and to give resurrection the brightness of His own glory. Having entered, as the fruit of the operation of His glory, into this new position, this is the model — the character — of that life in which we live before God.\*

[\* Indeed Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were all engaged in the resurrection of Christ. He raised the temple of His body in three days, was quickened by the Spirit, and raised by the glory of the Father.]

Without this manifestation in Christ, God, although acting and giving testimonies of His power and of His goodness, remained veiled and hidden. In Christ glorified, the center of all the counsels of God, we see the glory of the Lord with unveiled face, and every mouth confesses Him Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Our life ought to be the practical reflection of this glory of the Lord in heaven. The power that brings us into association with Him in this place, and still works in us, is shown at the end of the first chapter of the Ephesians\* But there it is to introduce our resurrection with Christ. Here it is Christ's own resurrection, the doctrine, or the thing in itself, and its consequences and moral import with regard to the individual living here below, in view of his relationship with God as a responsible man. It is an altogether new life. We are alive unto God through Him.

[\* To which we may add in full effect the end of the third. Details are found elsewhere.]

Identified thus with Him in the likeness of His death, we shall also enter into that of His resurrection. We see here that resurrection is a consequence which he deduces as a fact, not a mystical participation in the

thing; knowing this first (as the great foundation of everything), that our old man — that in us which pleads for sin as the fruit of the perfect grace of God — is crucified with Christ, in order that the whole body of sin should be destroyed so that we should no more serve sin. He takes the totality and the system of sin in a man, as a body which is nullified by death; its will is judged and no longer masters us. For he who is dead is justified\* from sin. Sin can no longer be laid to his charge as a thing that exists in a living and responsible man. Therefore, being thus dead with Christ — professedly by baptism, really by having Him for our life who died — we believe that we shall live with Him; we belong to that other world where He lives in resurrection. The energy of the life in which He lives is our portion: we believe this, knowing that Christ, being raised from among the dead, dieth no more. His victory over death is complete and final; death has no more dominion over Him. Therefore it is that we are sure of resurrection, namely, on account of this complete victory over death, into which He entered for us in grace. By faith we have entered into it with Him, having our part in it according to His therein. It is the power of the life of love that brought Him there. Dying, He died unto sin. He went down even to death rather than fail in maintaining the glory of God. Until death, and even in death, He had to do with sin, though there were none in Him, and with temptation; but there He has done with all for ever. We die unto sin by participating in His death. The consequence — by the glory of the Father — is resurrection. Now, therefore, “in that he died, he died unto sin once for all; in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.”

[\* The word is “justified.” And here we see distinctly the important difference between sin and sins: you cannot charge a dead man with sin. He has no perverse will, no evil lusts. He may have committed many sins while alive, he may or may not be justified from them. But you cannot accuse him of sin. And, as we have seen, from chapter 5:12, we are treating of sin — of man’s state — not of sins.]

Thus He has nothing more to do with sin. He lives, only perfectly, without reference in His life to anything else, unto God. In that He lives, His life is in relationship to God only.\* We also then ought to reckon — for it is by faith — that we are dead to sin and alive to God, having no other object of life than God, in Christ Jesus. I ought to consider myself dead, I have a right to do so, because Christ has died for me; and being alive now for ever unto God, I ought to consider myself as come out, by the life

which I live through Him, from the sin to which I died. For this is the Christ I know; not a Christ living on the earth in connection with me according to the nature in which I live here below. In that nature I am proved to be a sinner, and incapable of true relationship with Him. He has died for me as living of that life, and entered, through resurrection, into a new state of life outside the former. It is there that as a believer I know Him. I have part in death, and in life through Him who is risen. I have righteousness by faith, but righteousness as having part with Christ dead and raised again, as being therefore by faith dead unto sin.

[\* This is a wonderful expression. As to faithfulness His life was spent for God, He lived to God. But now His life knows nothing but God.]

And this is the essential difference of this part of the epistle. It is not that Christ has shed His blood for our sins, but that we have died with Him. There is an end for faith to our state and standing in flesh. The Christ who is become our life did die, and, as alive through Him, what He has done is mine; and I have to say I died. I reckon myself dead.\* The apostle deduces the evident consequence: "Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body." Do not yield your members as instruments to the sin to which you are dead by Christ; but as alive, as awakened up from amongst the dead, yield your members as instruments of righteousness to God unto whom you live. The body is now the mere instrument of divine life; and we are free to use it for God as such. For in fact sin shall not have dominion over us, because we are not under the law but under grace. Here it is not the principle but the power that is spoken of. In principle we are dead to sin, according to faith; in practice it has no power over us. Observe that the source of practical power to conquer sin is not in the law, but in grace.

[\* Note here, the Epistle to the Romans does not go on to say we are risen with Christ. That leads on necessarily to union, and is Ephesian ground. Only we must remark that death and resurrection never go on to the heavenly state; they are the subjective experimental state. In Ephesians, when dead in sins, we are taken, quickened, and put into Christ, as Christ was raised and put into glory above the heavens: simply God's work. Here it is individual: we are alive in Him. We shall have part in His resurrection, walking in newness of life. It is personal and practical: man, as we have seen, alive on earth.]

Now it is true that, not being under the law, the rule under which we are placed is not that of imputation but of non-imputation. Is this a reason why we should sin? No! there is a reality in these things. We are slaves to



that which we obey. Sin leads to death; obedience to practical righteousness. We are upon the wider principle of a new nature and grace; not the application of an external rule to a nature which was not, and could not be subject to it. And, in truth, having been in the former case, the disciples in Rome had given proof of the justice of the apostle's argument by walking in the truth. Set free from the slavery of sin, they had become (to use human language) the slaves of righteousness, and this did not end in itself; practical righteousness developed itself by the setting apart of the whole being for God with ever-growing intelligence. They were obedient in such-and-such things; but the fruit was sanctification, a spiritual capacity, in that they were separated from evil, unto a deeper knowledge of God.\* Sin produced no fruit, it ended in death; but set free from sin and become servants to God — the true righteousness of obedience, like that of Christ Himself — they had their fruit already in holiness, and the end should be eternal life. For the wages of sin was death, the gift of God was eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Now this life was living unto God, and this is not sin; nevertheless it is grace. Here the apostle, whose subject is judicial righteousness before God, approximates to John, and connects his doctrine with that of the First Epistle of John, who there, on the other hand, enters upon the doctrine of propitiation and acceptance when speaking of the impartation of life. The appeal is very beautiful to a man in true liberty — the liberty of grace, being dead to sin. He is set wholly free by death. To whom is he now going to yield himself? For now he is free; is he going to give himself up to sin? It is a noble appeal.\*\*

[\* Compare Exodus 33:13.]

[\*\* It is not, note, an appeal to sinners as sometimes used, but to those already set free.]

**CHAPTER 7.** We have considered the effect of the death and resurrection of Christ with reference to justification and to practical life. In the early part of the epistle (to chap. 5:11) He has died for our sins. From chapter 5:12, He having died, we reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to God through Him. Our state as under the two heads, Adam and Christ, has been discussed. Another point remained to be treated of by the apostle — the effect of this last doctrine upon the question of the law. The Christian, or, to say better, the believer, has part in Christ as a Christ who has died, and lives to God, Christ being raised from the dead through Him. What is the

force of this truth with regard to the law (for the law has only power over a man so long as he lives)? Being then dead, it has no longer any hold upon him. This is our position with regard to the law. Does that weaken its authority? No. For we say that Christ has died, and so have we therefore; but the law no longer applies to one that is dead.

In bringing out the effect of this truth, the apostle uses the example of the law of marriage. The woman would be an adulteress if she were to be to another while her husband was alive; but when her husband is dead she is free. The application of this rule changes the form of the truth. It is certain that one cannot be under the authority of two husbands at once. One excludes the other. The law, and Christ risen, cannot be associated in their authority over the soul. But in our case the law does not lose its force (that is, its rights over us) by its dying, but by our dying. It reigns over us only while we live. It is with this destruction of the bond by death the apostle began. The husband died, but in application it is annulled by our dying. We are then dead to the law by the body of Christ (for we have to do with a Christ risen after His death), that we should be to Him who is raised from the dead, in order that we should bear fruit for God; but we cannot belong to the two at once.

When we were in the flesh — when, as man, any one was held to be walking in the responsibility of a man living in the life of nature, as a child of Adam, the law to him was the rule and perfect measure of that responsibility, and the representative of the authority of God. The passions which impelled to sin acted in that nature, and, meeting with this barrier of the law, found in it that which, by resisting it, excited the will, and suggested, even by the prohibition itself, the evil which the flesh loved and which the law forbade; and thus these passions acted in the members to produce fruit which brought in death. But now he was outside its authority, he had disappeared from its pursuit,\* being dead in that law to the authority of which we had been subjected. Now to have died under the law would have been also condemnation; but it is Christ who went through this and took the condemnation, while we have the deliverance from the old man which is in death. Our old man is crucified with Him, so that it is our deliverance to die to the law. It did but condemn us, but its authority ends with the life of him who was under that authority. And being dead in Christ, the law can no longer reach those who had been under it: we belong

to the new husband, to Christ risen, in order that we should serve in newness of spirit, the goodwill of grace in our new life, and — as the apostle will afterwards explain, by the Holy Ghost\*\* not in the bondage of the letter.

[\* It is thus, I doubt not, that this passage should be read. My reader may perhaps find “the law being dead.” The expression, “dead to that wherein we were held,” alludes to verse 4, where it is said, “ye died to the law.” Christ under the law died under its curse. To be in the flesh is to live under the responsibility of a man in his natural life — a child of fallen Adam. In that life (unless it is lawless) the law is the rule of human righteousness. We must not confound the flesh being in the Christian with a man being in the flesh. The principle of the old life is still there, but it is in no way the principle of his relationship to God. When I am in the flesh, it is the principle of my relationship with God; but, its will being sinful, it is impossible that I should please God. I may seek for righteousness in it — it will be on the ground of law. But the Christian is dead by Christ to all that state of things — does not live of that life; his life is in Christ, and he has received the Holy Ghost. The flesh is no longer the principle of his relationship with God; on that ground he has owned himself lost. Elsewhere we learn that he is in Christ on the ground upon which Christ is before God. The Holy Ghost, as we shall see, places him there in power by faith, Christ being his life.]

[\*\* He does not say here by the Spirit, because he has not yet spoken of the gift of the Holy Ghost in virtue of the work of Christ. He only speaks of the manner, the character, of the service rendered.]

This is the doctrine. Now for the conclusions that may be deduced from it. Is the law, then, sin, that we are withdrawn from its authority? By no means. But it gave the knowledge of sin, and imputed it. For the apostle says, that he would not have understood that the mere impulse of his nature was sin, if the law had not said, Thou shalt not covet. But the commandment gave sin occasion to attack the soul. Sin, that evil principle of our nature,\* making use of the commandment to provoke the soul to the sin that is forbidden (but which it took occasion to suggest by the interdiction itself, acting also on the will which resisted the interdiction), produced all manner of concupiscence. For, without the law, sin could not plunge the soul into this conflict, and give the sentence of death in it, by making it responsible in conscience for the sin which, without this law, it would not have known. Under the law lust acted, with the conscience of sin in the heart; and the result was death in the conscience, without any deliverance for the heart from the power of concupiscence.

[\* It will be remembered that all through this part of the epistle (that is, from chapter 5:12) we have to do with sin, not with sins.]

Without the law, sin did not thus agitate a will which refused submission to that which checked it. For a barrier to the will awakens and excites the will: and the conscience of sin, in the presence of God's prohibition, is a conscience under sentence of death. Thus the commandment, which in itself was unto life, became in fact unto death. "Do this and live" became death, by showing the exigencies of God to a sinful nature whose will rejected them, and to a conscience which could not but accept the just condemnation.

A man walks in quiet indifference, doing his own will, without knowledge of God, or consequently any sense of sin or rebellion. The law comes, and he dies under its just judgment, which forbids everything that he desires. Lust was an evil thing, but it did not reveal the judgment of God; on the contrary, it forgot it. But when the law was come, sin (it is looked at here as an enemy that attacks some person or place), knowing that the will would persist and the conscience condemn, seized the opportunity of the law, impelled the man in the direction contrary to the law, and slew him, in the conscience of sin which the law forbade on the part of God. Death to the man, on God's part in judgment, was the result. The law then was good and holy, since it forbade the sin, but in condemning the sinner.

Was death then brought in by that which was good? No. But sin, in order that it might be seen in its true light, employed that which was good to bring death upon the soul; and thus, by the commandment, became exceedingly sinful. In all this, sin is personified as some one who seeks to kill the soul.

[\* Sin and death are correlative. The law is introduced in order to make manifest through the offense what they both are. The apostle first asks, "Is the law sin?" since its result was death to man. God forbid! but it gave the knowledge of sin, and wrote death upon the soul through judgment, man being a sinner. The second question is, "The law being thus good in itself, has it become death to me?" No. It is sin which (in order that it might appear in all its enormity) has slain me, using the law as a means, in my conscience. It found in man's condition the means of perverting this good thing, and making it death to him.]

Such then was the effect of the law, that first husband, seeing sin existed in man. To bring this out more plainly, the apostle communicates his spiritual apprehension of the experience of a soul under the law.

We must remark here, that the subject treated of is not the fact of the conflict between the two natures, but the effect of the law, supposing the will to be renewed, and the law to have obtained the suffrage of the conscience and to be the object of the heart's affections — a heart which recognises the spirituality of the law. This is neither the knowledge of grace, nor of the Savior Christ, nor of the Spirit.\* The chief point here is not condemnation (although the law does indeed leave the soul under judgment), but the entire want of strength to fulfill it, that it may not condemn us. The law is spiritual; but I, as man, am carnal, the slave of sin, whatever the judgment of my inward man may be: for I allow not that which I do. That which I would I do not; and that which I hate I practice. Thus loving and thus hating, I consent to the law that it is good. It is not that I do the evil as to moral intent of the will, for I would not the evil which I do; on the contrary I hate it. It is the sin then that dwells in me, for in fact in me (that is, in my flesh — the whole natural man as he is) there exists no good, for even where there is the will, I do not find the way to perform any good. Power is totally wanting.

[\* There is also conflict, when the Holy Ghost dwells in us. Galatians 5 speaks of this. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit," etc. But then we are not under the law, as the apostle goes on to say, "If ye are led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law." Here the person spoken of is under the law: everything is in connection with the law. The law is spiritual; we consent to the law, we delight in the law. Neither Christ nor the Spirit is mentioned until the question of deliverance comes in.]

In verse 20 the apostle, having this explanation, lays stress upon the I and me. "If that which I myself would" (we should read), and "It is no longer myself that does it, but the sin that dwelleth in me." I find then evil present with the myself which would do good; for, as to the inward man, I delight in the law of God. But there is in me another constant principle which wars against the law of my mind, which brings me into captivity to this law of sin in my members. So that, whatever my desires may be, the better even that they are, I am myself a miserable man. Being man, and such a man, I cannot but be miserable. But, having come to this, an immense step has been taken.

The evil here spoken of is the evil that is in our nature, and the want of power to get rid of it. The forgiveness of sins had been fully taught. What distresses here is the present working of sin which we cannot get rid of. The sense of this is often a more painful thing than past sins, which the believer can understand as put away by the blood of Christ. But here we have the conscience of sin still in us, though we may hate it, and the question of deliverance is mixed up with our experience, at least till we have learned what is taught us in this part of the epistle, to judge the old man as sin in us, not ourselves, and reckon ourselves dead. Christ, through whom we now live, having died, and being a sacrifice for sin, our condemnation is impossible, while sin is condemned and we free through "the law of the Spirit of life in him." It is not forgiveness, but deliverance, sin in the flesh being condemned in the cross.

Under divine grace the renewed man learned three things. First, he has come to the discovery that in him, that is, in his flesh, there is no good thing; but, secondly, he has learned to distinguish between himself, who wills good, and sin which dwells in him; but, further, that when he wills good, sin is too strong for him. Having thus acquired knowledge of himself, he does not seek to be better in the flesh, but deliverance, and he has it in Christ. Power comes after. He is come to the discovery and to the confession that he has no power. He throws himself upon another. He does not say, How can I? or, How shall I? but, Who shall deliver me? Now it was when we were devoid of all strength that Christ died for the ungodly. This want of strength is discovered; and we find grace at the end, when with regard to what we are, and to all hope of amelioration in ourselves, grace is our only resource.

But happily, when we cast ourselves upon grace, there is nothing but grace before us. Deliverance is accomplished by our not being alive in the flesh at all: we have died away from it, and from under the law, which held us in bondage and condemnation, and we are married to another, Christ raised from the dead; and as soon as the distressed soul has said, "Who shall deliver me?" the answer is ready, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." The answer is not, He will deliver. Deliverance is already accomplished: he gives thanks.

The man was wretched in conflict under law, without knowledge of redemption. But he has died in the death of Christ out of the nature which made him so; he has quite done with himself. The deliverance of God is complete. The two natures are still opposed to each other, but the deliverance is not imperfect. This deliverance wrought of God, and the progress of its manifestation, are developed in the next chapter.

We may here remark that the apostle does not say, “We know that the law is spiritual, and we are carnal.” Had he done so, it would have been to speak of Christians, as such, in their proper and normal condition. It is the personal experience of what the flesh is under law, when the man is quickened, and not the state of a Christian as such before God. Observe, also, that the law is looked at from the point of view of christian knowledge” — we know” — when we are no longer under it, and when we are capable of judging concerning its whole import, according to the spirituality of him who judges: and who sees also, being spiritual, what the flesh is; because he is now not in the flesh, but in the Spirit.\*

- [\* This gives the key to this — alas! because souls are not free — much spoken-of passage. It is not the present experience of any one, but a delivered person describing the state of an undelivered one. An undelivered person could not speak exactly thus, because he is uneasy as to the result for himself. A man in a morass does not quietly describe how a man sinks into it, because he fears to sink and stay there; when he is out, he describes how a man sinks there. The end of Romans 7 is a man out of the morass showing in peace the principle and manner in which one sinks in it. All this part of the epistle is more complicated than what precedes chapter 5:12, because our own experience is in conflict with what faith teaches us to say. If through grace I am forgiven and justified, there is no contradiction in my experience. It is what God has done for me outside myself. My debt is paid. But if I am to say, I am dead to sin, my experience contradicts it. Hence we have no rest in this respect, till we give up self or flesh as wholly bad and irremediable, and learn that, consequent on redemption, we are not in the flesh at all. Compare chapters 7 and 8.]

Literally, this passage is not the condition of anyone at all; but principles opposed to each other, the result of which is laid open by supposing a man under the law: the will always right, but good never done, evil always. Nevertheless to the conscience this is the practical condition of every renewed man under the law. We may remark one other important principle. Man in this condition is entirely taken up with himself; he desires good, he does not perform it, he does that which he would not. Neither Christ nor the Holy Ghost is named. In the normal condition of a

Christian, he is occupied with Christ. But what is expressed in this seventh chapter is the natural and necessary result of the law, when the conscience is awakened and the will renewed. For to will is present with him. But he is under law, sees its spirituality, consents to it, delights in it after the inner man, and cannot perform what is good. Sin has dominion over him. The sense of unanswered responsibility, and the absence of peace, cause the soul necessarily to turn in upon itself. It is taken up entirely with self, which is spoken of nearly forty times from verse 14. It is well to be so, rather than to be insensible. It is not peace.

This peace is found elsewhere, and it is in this; when reduced to the consciousness of one's own inability to do good towards God, one finds that God has done for us the good which we need. We are not only forgiven but delivered, and are in Christ, not in the flesh at all.

The conflict goes on, the opposition between the two natures continues, but we give thanks to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.\* Remark here that deliverance is only found when there is the full conviction of our incapacity and want of power, as well as of our sins. It is much more difficult to arrive at this conviction of incapacity than at that of having sinned. But the sin of our nature — its irremediable perversity, its resistance to good, the law of sin in our members — is only known in its legal gravity by experience of the uselessness of our efforts to do well. Under the law the uselessness of these efforts leaves the conscience in distress and bondage, and produces the sense of its being impossible to be with God. Under grace the efforts are not useless, and the evil nature shows itself to us (either in communion with God, or by downfalls if we neglect communion) in all its deformity in presence of that grace. But in this chapter the experience of sin in the nature is presented as acquired under the law, in order that man may know himself in this position — may know what he is as regards his flesh, and that in fact he cannot succeed in this way in coming before God with a good conscience. He is under the first husband; death had not yet severed the bond as to the state of the soul.

[\* The last verse of chapter 7 speaks of the abstract mind and character of the opposed natures; one the mind, however, and purpose of heart in the renewed man; the other, the fact of flesh being there, one "I myself," the other "my flesh." So the "I" is right; only it is not considered under the law or the contrary.]



We must now remember that this experience of the soul under the law is introduced parenthetically, to show the sinful condition to which grace applies and the effect of the law. Our subject is that the believer has part in the death of Christ and has died, and is alive through Him who is risen; that Christ, having by grace gone under death, having been made sin, has for ever done with that state in which He had to do with sin and death in the likeness of sinful flesh; and having for ever done with all that was connected with it, has entered by resurrection into a new order of things — a new condition before God, totally beyond the reach of all that to which He had subjected Himself for us, which in us was connected with our natural life, and beyond reach of the law which bound sin upon the conscience on God's part. In Christ we are in this new order of things.

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those which are in Christ Jesus” (chap. 8). He does not here speak of the efficacy of the blood in putting away sins (all-essential as that blood is, and the basis of all the rest), but of the new position entirely beyond the reach of everything to which the judgment of God applied. Christ had indeed been under the effect of the condemnation in our stead; but when risen He appears before God. Could there be a question there of sin, or of wrath, or of condemnation, or of imputation? Impossible! It was all settled before He ascended thither. He was there because it was settled. And that is the position of the Christian in Christ. Still, inasmuch as it is by resurrection, it is a real deliverance. It is the power of a new life, in which Christ is raised from the dead, and of which we live in Him. It is — as to this life of the saint — the power, efficacious and continued, and therefore called a law, by which Christ was raised from the dead — the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus; and it has delivered me from the law of sin and death which previously reigned in my members, producing fruit unto death. It is our connection with Christ in resurrection, witness of the power of life which is in Him, and that by the Holy Ghost, which links the “no condemnation” of our position with the energy of a new life, in which we are no longer subject to the law of sin, having died to it in His death, or to the law, whose claims ‘have ceased also necessarily for him who has died, for it has power over a man as long as he lives. Christ, in bearing its curse, has fully magnified it withal. We see, at the end of Ephesians 1, that it is the power of God Himself which delivers; and assuredly it had need be so

— that power which wrought the glorious change — to us this new creation.

This deliverance from the law of sin and death is not a mere experience (it will produce precious experiences); it is a divine operation, known by faith in His operation who raised up from the dead, known in all its power by its accomplishment in Jesus, in the efficacy of which we participate by faith. The difficulty of receiving it is that we find our experience clashing with it. That Christ has put away my sins, and that God has loved me, is a matter of simple faith through grace. That I am dead is apt to find itself contradicted in my heart. The process of chapter 7 must be gone through, and the condemnation of sin in the flesh seen in Christ's sacrifice for sin, and I alive by Him judging sin as a distinct thing (an enemy I have to deal with, not I), in order to have solid peace. It is not all that Christ has put away our sins. I live by Him risen, and am linked with this husband, and He being my life — the true "I" in me, I can say that I have died because He has. "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." If so, I have died, for He has; as one taken into partnership has the advantages belonging to that acquired, before he was taken into it. That this is so is evident according to verse 3. God has done it in Christ, the apostle says; he does not say "in us." The result in us is found in verse 4. The efficacious operation, by which we reckon ourselves dead, was in Christ a sacrifice for sin. There sin in the flesh was condemned. God has done it, for it is always God, and God who has wrought, whom he brings forward in order to develop the gospel of God. The thing to condemn is indeed in us; the work which put an end to it for our true conscious state before God, has been accomplished in Christ, who has been pleased in grace, as we shall see, to put Himself into the position necessary for its accomplishment. Nevertheless, through participation in the life that is in Him, it becomes a practical reality to us: only this realisation has to contend with the opposition of the flesh; but not so as that we should walk in it.

One other point remains to be noticed here. In verse 2, we have the new life in its power in Christ, which sets us free from the law of sin and death. In verse 3, we have the old nature, sin in the flesh, dealt with, condemned, but in the sacrifice for sin in which Christ suffered and died, so that it is

done with for faith. This completes the deliverance and the knowledge of it.

The key to all this doctrine of the apostle's, and that which unites holy practice, the christian life, with absolute grace and eternal deliverance from condemnation, is the new position entirely apart from sin, which death gives to us, being alive in Christ now before God. The power of God, the glory of the Father, the operation of the Spirit, are found acting in the resurrection of Christ, and placing Him, who had born our sins and been made sin for us, in a new position beyond sin and death before God. And by faith I have part in His death, I participate in this life.

It is not only satisfaction made by Christ for sins committed, and glorifying God in His work — the basis, indeed, of all — but the deliverance of the person who was in sin, even as when Israel was brought out of Egypt. The blood had stayed the hand of God in judgment; the hand of God in power delivered them for ever at the Red Sea. Whatever they may have been, they were for that time with God who had guided them to His holy habitation.

Moreover, the first verses of this chapter sum up the result of God's work with regard to this subject in chapters 5:12 to the end, 6 and 7: no condemnation for those who are in Christ; the law of the Spirit of life in Him delivering from this law of sin and death; and that which the law could not do God has done.

It will be remarked that the deliverance is from the law of sin and death: in this respect the deliverance is absolute and complete. Sin is no longer at all a law. This deliverance, to one who loves holiness, who loves God, is a profound and immense subject of joy. The passage does not say that the flesh is changed — quite the contrary; one would not speak of the law of a thing which no longer existed. We have to contend with it, but it is no more a law; neither can it bring us under death in our conscience.

The law could not work this deliverance. It could condemn the sinner, but not the sin while delivering the sinner. But that which the law could not do — inasmuch as it required strength in man, while on the contrary he had only strength for sin — God has done. Now it is here that Christ's coming down among us, and even unto death, is set before us in all its importance

— His coming down without sin unto us and unto death. This is the secret of our deliverance. God, the God of all grace and of glory, has sent Him who was the eternal object of His delight, His own Son, in whom was all the energy and divine power of the Son of God Himself, to partake of flesh and blood in the midst of men, in the position in which we all are; ever in Himself without sin, but — to go down to the depth of the position in which we were, even to death — emptying Himself of His glory to be a man, “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” and being a man humbling Himself unto death, in order that the whole question of sin with God should be decided in the person of Christ, He being considered as in our position;\* when in the likeness of sinful flesh He was made sin for us — “for sin,” as it is expressed (that is, a sacrifice for sin). He undertook to glorify God by suffering for that which man was. He accomplished it, making Himself a sacrifice for sin; and thus, not only our sins have been put away, but sin in the flesh (it was the state of man, the state of his being; and Christ was treated on the cross as though He were in it) has been condemned in that which was a sacrifice of propitiation for the sinner.

[\* The reader will understand that Jesus could take this position and be made sin, precisely because He was Himself absolutely exempt in every way from it. The power of resurrection in Christ dead was the power of holiness in Christ living. It was also the power of that love which He displayed while living, and which we know in perfection in His death. He was the just object of divine delight.]

The Son of God — sent of God in love — has come, and not only has He born our sins, but (He having offered Himself up freely to accomplish His will, whose will He was come to do, a spotless victim) God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us. He has placed Himself, ever without sin (in Him it was grace and obedience), in the place in which our failure in our responsibility here below had set man, and, made in the likeness of men, died to glorify God in respect of sin, so that we are discharged by the cross from the burden on the conscience of the sin that dwells in us. He takes on Himself before God the whole charge of sin (but according to the power of eternal life and the Holy Ghost that was in Him) offers Himself as a victim for it. Thus placed, He is made sin; and in His death, which He undergoes in grace, sin in the flesh is totally condemned by the just judgment of God, and the condemnation itself is the abolition of that sin by His act of sacrifice — an act which is valid for every one that believes in Jesus who

accomplished it. We have died with Him and are alive through Him. We have put off the body of the flesh, the old man; we have become dead to the law by the body of Christ, our old man crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be annulled. I have no doubt that the full result will be the putting of sin out of the whole scene of heaven and earth, in that new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. But here I speak of the state of conscience in respect of the glory of God.

What a marvelous deliverance! What a work for the glory of God! The moral import of the cross for the glory of God is a subject which, as we study it, becomes ever more and more magnificent — a never-ending study. It is, by its moral perfection, a motive for the love of the Father Himself with regard to Jesus. “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again.”

What a perfect work for putting away sin from the sight of God (setting before Him in its stead that perfect work itself which removed the sin) and for delivering the sinner, placing him before God according to the perfect abolition of the sin and the value of that work in His sight! It is possible we may have known the forgiveness of sins before we go through Romans 7, and some have said that chapter 3 comes before chapter 7. But the subjects are quite distinct. In the first part we have God dealing in grace with the sinner as guilty for his justification, and that part is complete in itself: “we joy in God.” The second part takes up what we are, and experiences connected with it; but the work of chapter 7 is always essentially legal, the judgment of what we are, only hence in respect of what is in us, not of what we have done — struggle, not guilt. The form of experience will be modified. The soul will say, I hope I have not deceived myself, and the like. But it is always law, and so the apostle gives it its proper character in itself.

The practical result is stated in verse 4: “In order that the righteousness of the law,” its just requirement, “might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.” We are perfect before God in Christ without any righteousness by the law; but, walking according to the Spirit, the law is fulfilled in us, although we are not subject to it. He who loves has fulfilled the law. The apostle does not go farther in fruits of righteousness here, because the question was that of subjection to the law and man’s

fulfilling it. Grace produces more than this as in Ephesians, Colossians, and elsewhere, reproduces the character of God, not merely what man should be for God, but what Christ was. But here he meets the question of law, and shows that in walking by the Spirit we so fulfill it.

In this new nature, in the life of resurrection and of faith, that which the law demands is accomplished in us because we are not under it, for we walk according to the Spirit, and not according to the flesh. The things now in opposition are the flesh and the Spirit. In fact the rule, from the yoke of which as a system we are set free, is accomplished in us. Under the law sin had the mastery; being set free from the law, that law is fulfilled in us.\* But it is the Spirit working in us and leading us which characterises our position. Now this character (for it is thus the apostle presents it) is the result of the presence, the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in us. The apostle supposes this great truth here. That is to say, writing to Christians, the fact (for it was a fact that is in question here) of the presence of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, is treated as a well-known fact. It publicly distinguished the Christian as the seal and mark of his profession. The individual knew it for himself; he knew it with regard to the assembly. But in the latter aspect, we leave it aside here, for Christians individually are the subject. They had the Spirit; the apostle everywhere appeals to their consciousness of this fact. "After that ye believed ye were sealed." "Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith?" etc. It is the individual moral effect, extending, however, to the resurrection of the body, which is here spoken of. The two things are connected: the acknowledged fact of the presence of the Holy Ghost; and the development of His energy in the life, and afterwards in the resurrection of the believer. This had been seen in Christ; resurrection itself was according to the Spirit of holiness.

[\* Abstracting the flesh, the life by which we live is in fact Christ. He is our life, and, as to life, what we are before God is that by which we live here. Our life is hid with Christ in God, and Christ is our life down here. And therefore it is that John — who had displayed Christ as being this life — can say, "he that is born of God cannot sin, because he is born of God." It is the same Christ in us and in heaven. Practically this life is developed in the midst of the opposition of the flesh. Our weakness — guilty weakness — comes in, and it is quite another thing.]

We come then now into the practical effect, in the Christian on earth, of the doctrine of death with, and life through, Christ, realised by the dwelling in us of the Holy Ghost who has been given us. He is distinct, for He is the Spirit, the Spirit of God; nevertheless He acts in the life, so that it is practically ourselves in that which is of the life of Christ in us.

We will examine the apostle's teaching briefly on this subject.

He introduces it abruptly, as characterising the Christian — "us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Those who are after the flesh desire the things of the flesh; those after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. It is not a question here of duty, but of the sure action of the nature according to which a person subsists; and this tendency, this affection of the nature, has its unfailing result — that of the flesh is death, that of the Spirit is life and peace. Because the affection of the flesh is enmity against God. It has its own will, its own lusts; and the fact that it has them makes it not subject to the law of God — which, on the contrary, has its own authority — and the flesh cannot, indeed, be subject; it would cease to exist if it could be so, for it has a will of its own which seeks independency, not the authority of God over it — a will which does not delight either in what the law requires. Therefore those who are in the flesh, and who have their relationship with God as living of this nature, of this natural life, cannot please God. Such is the verdict on man, living his natural life, according to the very nature of that life. The law did not bring him out thence: he was still in the flesh as before. It had a rule for man, such as he is as man before God, which gave the measure of his responsibility in that position, but which evidently did not bring him out of the position to which it applied. So that man being in the flesh, the workings of sin were, by means of the law itself, acting to produce death.

But the principle of the believer's relationship with God is not the flesh but the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in us. It is that which characterises our position before God. In His sight, and before Him, we are not in the flesh. This, indeed, supposes the existence of the flesh, but having received the Holy Ghost, and having life of the Holy Ghost, it is He who constitutes our link with God. Our moral existence before God is in the Spirit, not in the flesh or natural man.

Observe here, that the apostle is not speaking of gifts or manifestations of power, acting outside us upon others, but of the vital energy of the Spirit, as it was manifested in the resurrection of Jesus and even in His life in holiness. Our old man is reckoned dead; we live unto God by the Spirit. Accordingly this presence of the Spirit — all real as it is — is spoken of in a manner which has the force rather of character than of distinct and personal presence, although that character could not exist unless He were personally there. “Ye are in Spirit, if so be that Spirit of God dwell in you.”\* The emphasis is on the word God, and in the Greek there is no article before Spirit. Nevertheless it plainly refers to the Spirit personally, for it is said “dwell in you,” so that He is distinct from the person He dwells in.

[\* Note here, we are said to be in Christ in the beginning of the chapter, and in the Spirit here: so to have the Spirit of Christ, and then “if Christ be in you”; because it is by the Spirit we are in Christ. He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit (compare John 14). And this gives its true character to our life and place before God. In Christ and Christ in us constitutes, in many places in scripture, the christian position, known too by the Holy Ghost dwelling in us (compare John 14).]

But the force of the thing is this: there is nothing in man that can resist the flesh or bring man out of it; it is himself. The law cannot go beyond this boundary (namely, that of man to whom it is addressed), nor ought it, for it deals with his responsibility. There must be something which is not man, and yet which acts in man, that he may be delivered. No creature could do anything in this: he is responsible in his own place.

It must be God. The Spirit of God coming into man does not cease to be God, and does not make the man cease to be man; but He produces divinely in the man, a life, a character a moral condition of being, a new man; in this sense, a new being, and in virtue of the cleansing by Christ’s blood. He dwells — Christ having accomplished the work of deliverance, of which this is the power in us — in the man, and the man is in Christ and Christ in the man. But having thus really a new life, which has its own moral character, the man is, as such, before God; and in His sight, what he is in this new nature inseparably from its source, as the stream from the fountain; the believer is in the Spirit, the Holy Ghost being in consequence of Christ’s work active in, and the power of, the life He has given. This is the Christian’s standing before God. We are no longer in the flesh, but in



the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in us. There is no other means. And it is indeed the Spirit of Christ — He in the power of whom Christ acted, lived, offered Himself; by whom also He was raised from the dead. His whole life was the expression of the operation of the Spirit — of the Spirit in man. “Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” It is the true and only link, the eternal reality, of the new life in which we live in God.

We have to do with reality. Christianity has its realisation in us in a conformity of nature to God, with which God cannot dispense, and without which we cannot enjoy or be in communion with Him. He Himself gives it. How indeed can we be born of God, unless God acts to communicate life to us? We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. But it is the Spirit who is its source and its strength. If any one has not the Spirit of Christ, if the energy of this spiritual life which was manifested in Him, which is by the power of the Spirit, is not in us, we are not of Him, we have no part in Christ, for it is thus that one participates in Him. But if Christ is in us, the energy of this spiritual life is in Him who is our life, and the body is reckoned dead; for if it have a will as being alive, it is nothing but sin. The Spirit is life, the Spirit by whom Christ actively lived; Christ in Spirit in us is life — the source of thought, action, judgment, everything that constitutes the man, speaking morally, in order that there may be righteousness; for that is the only practical righteousness possible, the flesh cannot produce any. We live only as having Christ as our life; for righteousness is in Him, and in Him only, before God. Elsewhere there is nothing but sin. Therefore to live is Christ. There is no other life; everything else is death.

But the Spirit has yet another character. He is the Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from among the dead. This God did with regard to the Christ. If the Spirit dwells in us, God will accomplish in us that which He accomplished in the Christ,\* because of this same Spirit. He will raise up our mortal bodies. This is the final deliverance, the full answer to the question, “Who shall deliver me from this body of death?”

[\* Observe here, that Jesus is the personal name of Christ. Christ though it became so, is properly a name of position and office — the Anointed. He who raised up the Christ will quicken the bodies of those connected with Him.]

Observe here, that the Spirit is designated in three ways: the Spirit of God, in contrast with sinful flesh, with the natural man, the Spirit of Christ, the formal character of the life which is the expression of His power (this is the Spirit acting in man according to the perfection of the divine thoughts); the Spirit of Him that raised up the man Christ from among the dead. Here it is the perfect and final deliverance of the body itself by the power of God acting through His Spirit. Thus then we have got the full answer to the question, “Who shall deliver me?” We see that christian life in its true character — that of the Spirit, depends on redemption. It is by virtue of redemption that the Spirit is present with us.

In verses 10, 11, we have present death to flesh and sin, and actual resurrection; only, since there is nothing but sin if we live of our own natural life, Christ being in us, our life, we reckon even now, while still living, our body to be dead. This being the case, we have that which was seen in Christ (chap. 1:4) the Spirit of holiness and resurrection from the dead. We should observe how (thus far according to the force of the expression, “the Spirit is life”) the Person of the Spirit is linked with the state of the soul here, with the real life of the Christian. A little lower down we find Him distinct from it. We understand this: for the Spirit is truly the divine Person, but He acts in us in the life which He has imparted. “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Thus it is indeed the Spirit who produces practical righteousness, good thoughts; but He produces them in me so that they are mine. Nevertheless I am entirely dependent, and indebted to God for these things. The life is of the same nature as its source according to John 3, but it is dependent; the whole power is in the Spirit. Through Him we are dependent on God. Christ Himself lived thus. Only the life was in Him, and no sin in the flesh to resist it: whereas, if God has given us life, it remains always true that this life is in His Son. “He that hath the Son hath life.” And we know the flesh lusts against the Spirit, even when we have it.

But to proceed with our chapter. The apostle concludes thus exposition of the spiritual life, which gives liberty to the soul, by presenting the Christian as being thus a debtor, not to the flesh, which has now no longer any right over us. Yet he will not say directly that we are debtors to the Spirit. It is indeed our duty to live after the Spirit; but if we said that we are debtors, it would be putting man under a higher law the fulfillment of

which would thereby be yet more impossible to him. The Spirit was the strength to live, and that through the affections which He imparts — not the obligation to have them. If we live after the flesh, we are going to die; but if by the Spirit we mortify the deeds of the body, we shall live. The evil is there, but strength is there to overcome it. This is the effect according to the nature of God and of the flesh. But there is another side of the subject — the relationship which this presence and operation of the Spirit gives us towards God. Instead then of saying “legal debtors to the Spirit,” the Spirit Himself is our power, by which we mortify the flesh and thus are sure of living with God; and we are the sons of God, being led of the Spirit. For we have not received a spirit of bondage to be again in fear (that was the condition of the faithful under the law), but a Spirit that answers to our adoption to be sons of God, and this is its power — a Spirit by which we cry, “Abba,

The apostle again connects the Spirit of God in the closest union with the character, the spirit, which He produces in us, according to the relationship in which we are placed by His grace in Christ, and of which we are conscious, and which in fact we realise by the presence of the Holy Ghost in us: He is in us a Spirit of adoption. For He sets us in the truth, according to the mind of God. Now as to the power for thus, as to its moral reality in us, it is by the presence of the Holy Ghost alone that it takes place. We are only delivered from the law and the spirit of bondage in that the Spirit dwells in us, although the work and the position of Christ are the cause. This position is neither known nor realised except by the Spirit, whom Jesus sent down when He had Himself entered into it in glory on high as man.\* But this Spirit dwells in us, acts in us, and brings us in effect into this relationship which has been acquired for us by Christ, through that work which He accomplished for us, entering into it Himself (that is, as man risen).

[\* Though ever walking as Son down here of course, and that not merely when publicly entering on His ministry and proclaimed such, as we know from what happened in the temple when He was about twelve years old. Indeed we are sons before we receive the Spirit of adoption. It is because we are sons the Spirit of the Son is sent into our hearts (Galatians 4). But Christ, entering into the full place of glory as man, according to the purpose of God through His work, received (Acts 2) the Spirit so as to confer it on us and associate us with Him there.]

The apostle, we have seen, speaks of the Spirit in us as of a certain character, a condition in which we are, because He instils Himself into our whole moral being — our thoughts, affections, object, action; or, rather, He creates them; He is their source; He acts by producing them. Thus He is practically a Spirit of adoption, because He produces in our souls all that appertains to this relationship. If He acts, our thoughts, our affections, act also; we are in the enjoyment of this relationship by virtue of this action. But having thus identified (and it could not be otherwise) the Holy Ghost with all that He produces in us, for it is thus that the Christian knows Him (the world does not receive Him because it does not see Him, nor know Him; but ye know Him because He is with you, and dwells in you: precious state!) when the Holy Ghost Himself is the source of our being and of our thoughts, according to the counsels of God in Christ and the position which Christ has acquired for us — the apostle, I repeat, having spoken of the Spirit as characterising our moral existence, is careful to distinguish Him as a person, a really distinct existence. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. The two things are equally precious:\* participation in the Spirit, as the power of life by which we are capable of enjoying God, and the relationship of children to Him; and the presence and authority of the Spirit to assure us of it.

[\* We shall see, farther on, that the Epistle to the Colossians speaks only of life: the Ephesians, of the Holy Ghost.]

Our position is that of sons, our proper relationship that of children. The word son is in contrast with the position under the law, which was that of servants; it is the state of privilege in its widest extent. To say the child of such an one, implies the intimacy and the reality of the relationship. Now there are two things which the apostle lays open — the position of child and its consequences, and the condition of the creature in connection with which the child is found. This gives occasion for two operations of the Spirit — the communication of the assurance of being children with all its glorious consequences; and His work of sympathy and grace in connection with the sorrows and infirmities in which the child is found here below.

Having thus completed the exposition of the child's condition, he ends this account of his position in Christ with a statement of the certainty of the grace — outside himself — in God, which secures him in this position, and

guards him, by the power of God in grace, from everything that could rob him of his blessing — his happiness. It is God who gives it him, and who is its Author. It is God who will bring to a good end the one whom He has placed in it. This last point is treated in verses 31-33. Thus in verses 1-11, we have the Spirit in life; in verses 12-30, the Spirit as a power acting in the saint; in verses 31-33, God acting for, not in, us to ensure our blessing. Hence, in the last part, he does not speak of sanctification.

The first point then we have to touch on in this second part is, that the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of the family of God. That is to say, that as the Holy Ghost (acting in us in life, as we have seen) has produced the affections of a child, and, by these affections, the consciousness of being a child of God, so He does not separate Himself from this, but, by His powerful presence, He bears witness Himself that we are children. We have this testimony in our hearts in our relationship with God; but the Holy Ghost Himself, as distinct from us, bears this testimony to us in whom He dwells. The true freed Christian knows that his heart recognises God as Father, but he knows also that the Holy Ghost Himself bears His testimony to him. That which is founded on the word is realised and verified in the heart.

And, if we are children, we are heirs — heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Glorious position in which we are placed with Christ! And the witness of this is the first part of the Spirit's personal office; but this has its consequences here, it has its character here. If the Spirit of Christ is in us, He will be the source in us of the sentiments of Christ. Now in this world of sin and of misery Christ necessarily suffered — suffered also because of righteousness, and because of His love. Morally this feeling of sorrow is the necessary consequence of possessing a moral nature totally opposed to everything that is in the world. Love, holiness, veneration for God, love for man, everything is essential suffering here below; an active testimony leads to outward suffering. Co-heirs, co-sufferers, co-glorified — this is the order of christian life and hope; and, observe, inasmuch as possessors of the whole inheritance of God, this suffering is by virtue of the glorious position into which we are brought, and of our participation in the life of Christ Himself. And the sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

For the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. Then shall its deliverance come. For, if we suffer, it is in love, because all is suffering around us. The apostle then explains it. It is our connection with the creature which brings us into this suffering, for the creature is subjected to misery and vanity. We know it, we who have the Spirit, that all creation groans in its estrangement from God, as in travail, yet in hope. When the glory shall set the children free, the creature will share their liberty: it cannot participate in the grace; this is a thing which concerns the soul. But glory being the fruit of God's power in outward things, even the creature shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption and partake in the liberty of the glory. For it is not the Will of the creature which made it subject (it has none in that respect); but it was on account of him who subjected it, on account of man.

Now the Spirit, who makes us know that we are children and heirs of glory, teaches us by the same means to understand all the misery of the creature; and through our bodies we are in connection with it, so that there is sympathy. Thus we also wait for the adoption, that is, the redemption of the body. For as to possession of the full result, it is in hope that we are saved; so that meanwhile we groan, as well as understand, according to the Spirit and our new nature, that all creation groans. There are the intelligence of the Spirit, and the affections of the divine nature on the one side; and the link with fallen creation by the body, on the other.\* Here then also the operation of the Holy Ghost has its place, as well as bearing witness that we are children and heirs of God with Christ.

[\* In this how much more perfect (all in Him was absolute) was the sympathy of Christ! For though capable of sympathy as truly a man, He was not linked in His own state with the fallen creation, as we are. He felt for it, a true man, but as man born of the Holy Ghost; we as above the flesh and by faith not in it, still in fact are linked with it in the earthen vessel we are in.]

It is not therefore creation only which groans, being in bondage to corruption in consequence of the sin of man; but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit — which God has given in anticipation of the accomplishment of His promises in the last days, and which connects us with heaven — we also groan, while waiting for the redemption of our body to take possession of the glory prepared for us. But it is because the Holy Ghost who is in us takes part in our sorrow and helps us in our infirmities; dwelling in us, He pleads in the midst of this misery by groans,

which do not express themselves in words. The sense of the evil that oppresses us and all around us is there; and the more conscious we are of the blessing and of the liberty of the glory, the more sensible are we of the weight of the misery brought in by sin. We do not know what to ask for as a remedy; but the heart expresses its sorrow as Jesus did at the grave of Lazarus — at least in our little measure. Now this is not the selfishness of the flesh which does not like to suffer; it is the affection of the Spirit.

We have here a striking proof of the way in which the Spirit and the life in us are identified in practice: God searches the hearts — ours; He finds the affection of the Spirit, for He, the Spirit, intercedes. So that it is my heart — it is a spiritual affection, but it is the Spirit Himself who intercedes. United to the creature by the body, to heaven by the Spirit, the sense which I have of the affliction is not the selfishness of the flesh, but the sympathy of the Spirit, who feels it according to\* God.

[\* “The will of” should not be inserted here.]

What a sweet and strengthening thought, that when God searches the heart, even if we are burdened with a sense of the misery in the midst of which the heart is working. He finds there, not the flesh, but the affection of the Spirit; and that the Spirit Himself is occupied in us, in grace, with all our infirmities: What an attentive ear must God lend to such groans!

The Spirit, then, is the witness in us that we are children, and thereby heirs; and He takes part in the sorrowful experience that we are linked with creation by our bodies, and becomes the source of affections in us, which express themselves in groans that are divine in their character as well as human, and which have the value of His own intercession. And this grace shows itself in connection with our ignorance and weakness. Moreover, if after all we know not what to ask for, we know that everything works together under God’s own hand for our greatest good\* (v. 28).

[\* Here read in the text, “but we know.” “We know not what to ask for as we ought, but we do know that everything works together for our good.”]

This brings in, thirdly, another side of the truth — that which God does, and that which God is for us, outside ourselves, to assure us of all blessing. The Holy Ghost is life in us; He bears witness to our glorious position; He acts in divine sympathy in us, according to our actual position of infirmity

in this poor body and this suffering creation; He becomes, and makes us, the voice of this suffering before God. All this takes place in us; but God maintains all our privileges by that which He is in Himself. This is the last part of the chapter, from verse 28 or 31 to the end. God orders all things in favor of those who are called according to His purpose. For that is the source of all good and of all happiness in us and for us.

Therefore it is, that in this beautiful and precious climax, sanctification and the life in us are omitted. The Spirit had instructed our souls on these points at the beginning of the chapter. The Spirit is life, the body dead, if Christ be in us; and now He presents the counsels, the purposes, the acts, the operation of God Himself, which bless and secure us, but are not the life in us. The inward reality has been developed in the previous part; here, the certainty, the security, in virtue of what God is and of His counsels. He has foreknown His children, He has predestinated them to a certain glory, a certain marvelous blessing, namely, to be conformed to the image of His Son. He has called them, He has justified them, He has glorified them. God has done all this. It is perfect and stable, as He is who willed it, and who has done it. No link in the chain is wanting of all that was needful in order to bind their souls to glory according to the counsels of God.

And what a glory! what a position — poor creatures as the saved are — to be conformed to the image of the Son of God Himself! This, in fact, is the thought of grace, not to bless us only by Jesus, but to bless us with Him. He came down even to us, sinless, in love and righteousness, to associate us with Himself in the fruit of His glorious work. It was this which His love purposed, that we should have one and the same portion with Himself; and this the counsels of the Father (blessed be His name for it!) had determined also.

The result of all for the soul is, that God is for us. Sweet and glorious conclusion, which gives the heart a peace that is ineffable, and rest that depends on the power and stability of God — a rest that shuts out all anxiety as to anything that could trouble it; for if God be for us who can be against us? And the way of it shuts out all thought as to any limit to the liberality of God. He who had given His Son, how should He not with Him give us all things? Moreover, with regard to our righteousness before God, or to charges which might be brought against the saints, as well as with



regard to all the difficulties of the way, God Himself has justified: who shall condemn? Christ has died, He has risen, and is at the right hand of God, and intercedes for us: who shall separate us from His love? The enemies? He has already conquered them. Height? He is there for us. Depth? He has been there; it is the proof of His love. Difficulties? We are more than conquerors: they are the immediate occasion of the display of His love and faithfulness, making us feel where our portion is, what our strength is. Trial does but assure the heart, which knows His love, that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus. Everything else is the creature, and cannot separate us from the love of God — a love of God, which has entered also into this misery of the creature, and gained the victory for us over all. Thus the deliverance, and liberty, and security of the saints by grace and power are fully brought out.

We have thus in three ways God's being for us unfolded: in giving, justifying, and no possible separation. Two triumphant questions settle the last two points, on which the heart might easily raise questions. But the two questions are put: Who shall condemn? Who shall separate? Who shall condemn when God Himself justifies? It is not said justified before God. God is for us. The second is answered by the precious fact that in all that might seem to do so, we have seen, on the contrary, His love proved. Besides it is the creature which might tend to separate, and the love is the love of God. The beginning of verse 34 should be read with 33.

We have advanced here to a fuller experimental state than in chapter 5, following on what unfolds the exercises of a soul learning what it is in itself, and the operation of the law, and what it is to be dead with Christ, and to be alive through and associated with Him, and coming out, as in Him before God, with the consciousness of God for it. But there is in chapter 5 more of the simple grace of God, what He is in His own blessed nature and thoughts, as above sin, towards the sinner. We have the Christian's place more fully with God here, but what God is simply in grace more fully in chapter 5. Chapter 5 is more what God is thus known through the work of Christ; chapter 8 more our place in Christ before Him. Blessed to have both!

There remained one important question to be considered, namely, how this salvation, common to Jew and Gentile, both alienated from God — this

doctrine that there was no difference — was to be reconciled with the special promises made to the Jews. The proof of their guilt and ruin under the law did not touch the promises of a faithful God. Was the apostle going to do away with these to place the Gentiles on the same footing? They did not fail also to accuse the apostle of having despised his nation and its privileges. Chapters 9, 10 and 11 reply to this question; and, with rare and admirable perfection, set forth the position of Israel with respect to God and to the gospel. This reply opens, in itself, a wide door to intelligence in the ways of God.

The apostle begins by affirming his deep interest in the blessing of Israel. Their condition was a source of constant grief to him. Far from despising them, he loved them as much as Moses had done. He had wished to be anathema from Christ for them.\* He acknowledged that all the privileges granted by God until then, belonged to them. But he does not allow that the word of God had failed; and he develops proof of the free sovereignty of God, conformably to which, without trenching upon the promises made to the Jews, He could admit the Gentiles according to His election.

[\* Read, “I have wished.” Moses, in his anguish, had said, “Blot me out of thy book.” Paul had not been behind him in his love.]

In the first place, this truth displayed itself in the bosom of Abraham’s own family. The Jews alleged their exclusive right to the promises in virtue of their descent from him, and to have their promises by right, and exclusively, because they were descended from him. But they are not all Israel which are of Israel. Neither because they were of the seed of Abraham were they therefore all children. For in that case Ishmael must have been received; and the Jews would by no means hear of that. God then was sovereign. But it might be alleged that Hagar was a slave. But Esau’s case excluded even this saving thought. The same mother bore both sons of one father, and God had chosen Jacob and rejected Esau. It was thus on the principle of sovereignty and election, that God had decided that the seed should be called in the family of Isaac. And before Esau and Jacob were born, God declared that the elder should serve the younger. The Jews must then admit God’s sovereignty on this point.

Was God then unrighteous? He plainly declared His sovereignty for good to Moses as a principle. It is the first of all rights. But in what case had He

exercised this right? In a case that concerned that right of Israel to blessing, of which the Jews sought to avail themselves. All Israel would have been cut off, if God had dealt in righteousness; there was nothing but the sovereignty of God which could be a door of escape. God retreated into His sovereignty in order to spare whom He would, and so had spared Israel (justice would have condemned them all alike, gathered round the golden calf which they set up to worship) this, on the side of mercy; on that of judgment, Pharaoh served for an example. The enemy of God, and of His people, he had treated the claims of God with contempt, exalting himself proudly against Him — "Who is Jehovah, that I should obey him? I will not let his people go." Pharaoh being in this state, Jehovah uses him to give an example of His wrath and judgment. So that He shows mercy to whom He will, and hardens whom He will. Man complains of it, as he does of the grace that justifies freely.

As to rights, compare those of God and those of the creature who has sinned against Him. How can man, who is made of clay, dare to reply against God? The potter has power to do as he will with the lump. No one can say to God, What doest Thou? God's sovereignty is the first of all rights, the foundation of all rights, the foundation of all morality. If God is not God, what will He be? The root of the question is this; is God to judge man, or man God? God can do whatsoever He pleases. He is not the object for judgment. Such is His title: but when in fact the apostle presents the two cases, wrath and grace, He puts the case of God showing long suffering towards one already fitted for wrath, in order to give at last an example to men of His wrath in the execution of His justice; and then of God displaying His glory in vessels of mercy whom He has prepared for glory. There are then these three points established with marvelous exactitude; the power to do all things, no one having the right to say a word; wonderful endurance with the wicked, in whom at length His wrath is manifested; demonstration of His glory in vessels, whom He has Himself prepared by mercy for glory, and whom He has called, whether from among the Jews or Gentiles, according to the declaration of Hosea.

The doctrine established, then, is the sovereignty of God in derogation of the pretensions of the Jews to the exclusive enjoyment of all the promises, as being descended from Abraham; for, among his descendants, more than one had been excluded by the exercise of this sovereignty; and it was

nothing less than its exercise which, on the occasion of the golden calf, had spared those who pretended to the right of descent. It was necessary therefore that the Jew should recognise it, or else that he should admit the Idumeans in full right, as well as the Ishmaelites, and renounce it himself, the families of Moses and Joshua alone perhaps excepted. But if such was the sovereignty of God, He would now exercise it in favor of the Gentiles, as well as Jews. He called whom He would.

If we look closely into these quotations from Hosea, we shall find that Peter, who writes to converted Jews alone, takes only the passage at the end of chapter 2, where Lo-ammi and Lo-ruhamah become Ammi and Ruhamah. Paul quotes that also, which is at the end of chapter 1, where it is written, "In the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall they be called — not 'my people,' but 'the children of the living God.'" It is this last passage which he applies to the Gentiles called by grace.

But further passages from the prophets amply confirm the judgment which the apostle pronounces by the Spirit on the Jews. Isaiah declared formally that, if God had not left them a little remnant, they would have been as Sodom and Gomorrah; numerous as the people were, a little remnant only should be saved; for God was cutting the work short in judgment on the earth. And here was the state of things morally: the Gentiles had obtained the righteousness which they had not sought, had obtained it by faith; and Israel, seeking to obtain it by the fulfillment of a law, had not attained to righteousness. Why? Because they sought it not by faith, but by works of law. For they had stumbled at the stumbling-stone (that is, at Christ), as it is written, "I lay in Sion a stumbling-stone and rock of offense: and whosoever believeth in him shall not be ashamed."

Having touched on this subject, the apostle, who deeply loved his nation as the people of God, pours out his heart with respect of the doctrine which was a stumbling-stone to them. His desire, the aim of his heart's affection, was their salvation. The object of his affections, they were clothed in his eyes with their zeal for God, ignorant as it was; ignorant, alas! on the side of that which God taught. Being ignorant of God's righteousness, they sought in their zeal to establish their own

righteousness, and did not submit themselves to that of God. For Christ is the end of law for righteousness to every believer. There was found the righteousness of God, there the stumblingstone to Israel.

Nevertheless the apostle establishes his argument clearly and firmly. He establishes it on his own part; but Deuteronomy supplies him with an unexpected proof of the great principle. He quotes a passage from that book which speaks on the subject of Israel's condition, when they should have broken the law and be suffering its consequences. "Secret things," the lawgiver had said, "belong to our God; but those that are revealed" are for the people. That is to say, the law was given as a condition to the enjoyment of the blessing, plainly and positively; what God might do in grace, when Israel should be under the consequences of the broken law, remained in the secrecy of His supreme will. Upon this, however, another principle is distinctly revealed, namely, that when the fulfillment of the law was impossible, and when Israel had been driven out of their land for having broken it, if then their heart turned to God in that far country, He would accept them. It was all over with the law as a condition of relationship with God. Israel was driven out according to the chapter we are looking at (Deuteronomy 30) was Lo-ammi, no longer the people of God. The testimony of God was nevertheless addressed to them: they might turn to Him in spirit, and by faith. It was no longer the law, it was faith. But, says the apostle, if so, it is Christ who is its object. No Jew would have denied that the testimony of God was the hope of every true Israelite when all was ruined.

This passage then in Deuteronomy — when Moses has done with the law, and has supposed other counsels of God, and on them founds the principle of turning in heart to God when all is over with regard to the law, and Israel is in a place where it would be impossible to keep it, being in captivity among the Gentiles — this passage has remarkable significance in the argument of the apostle; and its being quoted is an extraordinary proof, that in his reasonings it is the Holy Ghost who acts. It is the apostle who introduces Christ; but the combination of the truths of the different positions of Israel, of the law, and of the return in heart when they were lost under the law a combination of which Christ was the key-stone and alone could be — exhibits a comprehensive view of the oneness of all God's ways, morally and in His dispensations, of which the Spirit of God

alone is capable, and which evidently expresses His thoughts. See Deuteronomy 29 (at the end) and 30.

The word of faith then set forth as being the hope of Israel, was that which the apostle announced — that if any one confessed with his mouth the Lord Jesus, and believed in his heart that God had raised Him from the dead, he should be saved. Precious, simple, and positive assertion! and born out, if that were needed, by the testimony of the Old Testament: “Whosoever believeth in him shall not be ashamed.” The words heart and mouth are in contrast with the law. In the case Deuteronomy supposes, Israel could not fulfill the law; the word of their God, Moses told them, could be in their heart and in their mouth. Thus now for the Jew (as for every one) it was the belief of the heart.

Observe, it does not say, If you love in your heart, or, If your heart is what it ought to be towards God; but, If you believe in your heart. A man believes with his heart, when he really believes with a heart interested in the thing. His affections being engaged in the truth, he desires, when grace is spoken of, that that which is told him should be the truth. He desires the thing, and at the same time he does not doubt it. It is not in his having part in it that he believes, but in the truth of the thing itself, being concerned in it as important to himself. It is not the state of his affections (a very serious consideration, however, in its place) that is the subject here, but the importance and the truth of that which is presented by the word — its importance to himself, as needing it for his salvation, a salvation that he is conscious of needing, that he cannot do without — a truth of which he is assured, as a testimony from God Himself. God affirms to such a one that salvation belongs to him, but it is not that which he has to believe in as the object of faith; it is that of which God assures every one who does believe.

Moreover thus faith is manifested by the proof it gives of its sincerity — by confession of the name of Christ. If some one were convinced that Jesus is the Christ, and refused to confess Him, his conviction would evidently be his greater condemnation. The faith of the heart produces the confession of the mouth; the confession of the mouth is the counterproof of the sincerity of the faith, and of honesty, in the sense of the claim which the Lord has upon us in grace. It is the testimony which God requires at the outset. It is to sound the trumpet on earth in face of the enemy. It is to

say that Christ has conquered, and that everything belongs in right to Him. It is a confession which brings in God in answer to the name of Jesus. It is not that which brings in righteousness, but it is the public acknowledgment of Christ, and thus gives expression to the faith by which there is participation in the righteousness of God, so that it may be said, 'He believes in Christ unto salvation; he has the faith that justifies.'

I have entered here a little more into detail, because this is a point on which the human heart perplexes itself; and perplexes itself so much the more because it is sincere, as long as there is any unbelief and self-righteousness remaining. It is impossible that an awakened soul should not feel the necessity of having the heart set right and turned to God; and hence, not submitting to the righteousness of God, he thinks to make the favor of God depend on the state of his own affections, whereas God loves us while we are yet sinners. The state of our affections is of all importance; but it supposes a relationship already existing, according to which we love. We love too because we are loved of God. Now His love has done something — has done something according to our necessities, and according to the divine glory. It has given Jesus; and Jesus has accomplished what was required, in order that we may participate in divine righteousness; and thus He has placed every one who (acknowledging that he is a lost sinner) believes in Him, in the secure relationship of a child and of a justified soul before God, according to the perfection of the work of Christ. Salvation belongs to this soul according to the declaration of God Himself. Loved with such love, saved by such grace, enjoying such favor, let it cultivate affections suitable to the gift of Jesus, and to the knowledge it has of Him and of His goodness.

It is evident that, if it is "whosoever" believes in Jesus, the Gentile comes in as well as the Jew. There is no difference; the same Lord is rich unto all that call upon Him. It is beautiful to see this form of expression, "There is no difference," repeated here. The apostle had used it before with the addition "for all have sinned." Sin puts all men on a level in ruin before God. But there is also no difference, "for the same Lord over all is rich unto all," for every one who calls upon His name shall be saved.

On this declaration, the apostle founds another argument; and by it he justifies the ways of God that were accomplished in his ministry. The

Jewish scriptures declared that every one who called upon the name of the Lord should be saved. Now, the Jews acknowledged that the Gentiles did not know the name of the true and living God. It was needful therefore to proclaim Him, in order that they might call upon Him, and the whole ministry of the apostle was justified. Accordingly it was written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace." For, in dealing with these questions among the Jews, he naturally rests on the authority of their own scriptures.

But he applies this principle for evangelisation to the Jews as well as to the Gentiles (for the law was not the announcement of good news). He quotes Isaiah to the same purpose. It was in a proclamation — a truth thus publicly preached — that Israel had not believed; so that there ought to be faith in a truth thus preached, in the word proclaimed. Verse 18 presents some difficulty. It is certain that the apostle intends to explain that a proclamation of the truth on God's part had taken place. Israel was without excuse, for the report had even gone out everywhere, the words which announced God unto the ends of the earth. The testimony then was not confined to the Jews The Gentiles had heard it everywhere. This is plain. But does the apostle merely borrow the words (which in the passage quoted apply to the testimony of creation), or does he mean to speak of the testimony of nature itself? I believe that he uses the passage to show that God had the Gentiles in view in His testimonies; that he wishes quietly to suggest this to the Jews by a quotation from their own scriptures, that not only have they, the Jews, heard, but that the testimony has gone everywhere, and that this was in the mind of God. Paul does not quote the passage as a prophecy of that which was taking place; he borrows the words, without that form of speech, to show that this universal testimony was in the mind of God, whatever might be the means employed. And then, stating the thing with more precision for the Jew, he adds, Did not Israel know? Was not the nation apprised of this extension to the Gentiles, of the testimony of this proclamation of grace to them, of the reception of the testimony by the Gentiles, so as to bring them into relationship with God? Yes; Moses had already said, that God would provoke Israel to jealousy by a people without knowledge. And Isaiah had spoken boldly, formally declaring that God should be found by a nation that sought Him not; and to Israel, that all day long He had



stretched forth His hands to a rebellious and gainsaying people; in a word, that the Gentiles should find Him, and Israel be perverse and disobedient. Thus, the testimony born to their relative positions — although the apostle approaches it gradually and quietly — is distinct and formal: the Gentiles received; Israel at enmity.

Hereupon the question is immediately raised, has God then rejected His people? To this chapter 11 is the answer. The apostle gives three proofs that it is by no means the case. Firstly, he is himself an Israelite; there is a remnant whom God has reserved, as in the days of Elias — a proof of the constant favor of the Lord, of the interest He takes in His people, even when they are unfaithful; so that when the prophet, the most faithful and energetic among them, knew not where to find one who was true to God besides himself, God had His eyes upon the remnant who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Secondly, the call of the Gentiles, and their substitution for Israel, was not the definitive rejection of the latter in the counsels of God; for God had done it to provoke Israel to jealousy. It was not, then, for their rejection. Thirdly, the Lord would come forth out of Sion. and turn away the iniquities of Jacob.

That which the apostle, or rather which the Holy Ghost, says on this point requires to be looked at in more detail.

The apostle, in quoting the case of Elias, shows that when Israel was in such a state that even Elias pleaded against them, yet God had not rejected them, He had reserved for Himself seven thousand men. This was the election of sovereign grace. It was the same thing now. But it was by grace, and not by works. The election then, has obtained the blessing, and the rest was blinded. Even as it was written, “God hath given them the spirit of slumber,” etc.

Had they then stumbled that they should fall? No! But through their fall salvation is come to the Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy — a second proof that it was not for their rejection. But if their diminishing and fall was a blessing to the Gentiles, what should not the fruit be of their restoration? If the first-fruits are holy, so is the lump; if the root, the tree also. Now, as to the continued chain of those who enjoy the promises in this world, Abraham was the root, and not the Gentiles; Israel, the natural stock and branches. And here is that which happened in the good olive-tree

of promise in this world, of which Abraham was the root (God Himself the source of leaf and fruit), and Israel the stem and the tree. There had been some bad branches, and they had been cut off; and others from the Gentiles grafted in, in their place, who thus enjoyed the richness natural to the tree of promise. But it was on the principle of faith that they, being of the wild olive-tree, had been grafted in. Many of the Israelite branches, the natural heirs of the promises, had been cut off because of their unbelief; for when the fulfillment of the promises was offered them, they rejected it. They rested on their own righteousness, and despised the goodness of God. Thus the Gentiles, made partakers of the promises, stood on the principle of faith. But if they abandoned this principle, they should lose their place in the tree of promise, even as the unbelieving Jews had lost theirs. Goodness was to be their portion in this dispensation of God's government, with regard to those who had part in the enjoyment of His promises, if they continued in this goodness; if not, cutting off. This had happened to the Jews; it should be the same with the Gentiles if they did not continue in that goodness. Such is the government of God, with regard to that which stood as His tree on the earth. But there was a positive counsel of God accomplished in that which took place, namely, the partial blinding of Israel (for they were not rejected) until all the Gentiles who were to have part in the blessing of these days should have come in. After this Israel should be saved as a whole; it should not be individuals spared and added to the assembly, in which Israel had no longer any place as a nation; they should be saved as a whole, as Israel. Christ shall come forth from Sion as the seat of His power, and shall turn away iniquity from Jacob, God pardoning them all transgressions.

This is the third proof that Israel was not rejected. For while enemies, as concerning the gospel at the present time, they are still beloved for the fathers' sakes. For that which God has once chosen and called He never casts off. He does not repent of His counsels, nor of the call which gives them effect. But if the counsel of God remains unchangeable, the way in which it is accomplished brings out the marvelous wisdom of God. The Gentiles had long continued in the disobedience of unbelief. God comes in grace. The Jews opposed themselves to the actings of grace. They lose all right to the promises through this unbelief, so that they must receive the effect of the promise on the footing of pure mercy and the sovereign grace

of God,\* in the same way as the poor Gentile. For He had shut them all up in unbelief, that it might be pure mercy to all. Therefore it is that the apostle exclaims, O depth of wisdom and knowledge! The promises are fulfilled, and the pretension to human righteousness annihilated; the Jews who have lost everything receive all on the true ground of the goodness of God. Their apparent loss of all is but the means of their receiving all from sovereign grace, instead of having it by virtue of human righteousness, or an unforfeited promise. All is grace: yet God is ever faithful, and that in spite of man's unfaithfulness. Man is blessed; the Jew receives the effect of the promise; but both the one and the other have to attribute it to the pure mercy of God. There is nothing about the assembly here: it is the tree of promise, and those who in virtue of their position have part successively in the enjoyment of the promises of earth. The unbelieving Jews were never cut off from the church, they were never in it. They had been in the position of natural heirs of the right to the promises. The assembly is not the Jews' own olive-tree according to nature, so that they should be grafted into it again. Nothing can be plainer: the chain of those who had a right to the promises from Abraham was Israel; some of the branches were then cut off. The tree of promise remains on the earth: the Gentiles are grafted into it in place of the Jews, they also become unfaithful (that is to say, the case is supposed), and they would in their turn be cut off, and the Jews be reinstated in the old olive-tree, according to the promises and in order to enjoy them; but it is in pure mercy. It is clearly not by the gospel they get the blessing; for, as touching the gospel, they are enemies for the Gentiles' sake; as touching election, beloved for the fathers' sake.

[\* Verse 31 should be translated, "Even so these the Jews] have now been unbelieving with regard to your mercy, in order that they should receive mercy" (or that they should be the objects of mercy)"your mercy," that is to say, the grace in Christ which extended to the Gentiles. Thus the Jews were the objects of mercy, having forfeited all right to enjoy the effect of the promise. God would not fail to fulfill it. He bestows it on them in mercy at the end, when He has brought in the fullness of the Gentiles.]

Remark further here an important principle: the enjoyment of privileges by position makes us responsible for them, without saying the individual was born again. The Jewish branch was in the tree of promise and broken off: so the Gentiles. There was nothing vital or real; but they were in the place

of blessing, “partakers of the root and fatness of the olive tree,” by being grafted in.

These communications of the mind of God end this portion of the book, namely, that in which the apostle reconciles sovereign grace shown to sinners (putting all on a level in the common ruin of sin) with the especial privileges of the people of Israel, founded on the faithfulness of God. They had lost everything as to right. God would fulfill His promises in grace and by mercy.

The apostle resumes the thread of his instructions, by taking up — as he does in all his epistles — the moral consequences of his doctrine. He places the believer at the outset on the ground of God’s mercy, which he had fully developed already. The principle of grace that saves had been established as the basis of salvation. The ground of all christian morality is now laid in this fundamental principle: to present our bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy, acceptable to God — an intelligent service, not that of the hands, not consisting in ceremonies which the body could perform — a simple but deep-reaching and all-efficacious principle. This was for man personally. As to his outward relationships, he was not to be conformed to the world. Neither was this to be an outside mechanical nonconformity, but the result of being renewed in mind, so as to seek for and discern the will of God, good and acceptable and perfect; the life being thus transformed.

This connects itself with the end of chapter 6. It is not those sitting in heavenly places, imitators of God as dear children, but men on earth set free by the delivering power of redemption and grace, yielding themselves up to God to do His will. The exhortation follows the character we have seen to be that of the epistle.

Thus the christian walk was characterised by devotedness and obedience. It was a life subjected to the will of another, namely, to the will of God; and therefore stamped with humility and dependence. But there was absolute devotedness of heart in self-sacrifice. For there was a danger, flowing from the power that acted in it, of the flesh coming in and availing itself of it. With regard to this, every one was to have a spirit of wisdom and moderation, and to act within the limits of the gift which God had dispensed to him, occupying himself with it according to the will of God;

even as each member has its own place in the body, and should accomplish the function which God has ascribed to it. The apostle passes on insensibly to all the forms which duty assumes in the Christian, according to the various positions in which he stands, and to the spirit in which he ought to walk in every relationship.

It is in chapter 12 only that the idea of the assembly as a body is thus found in this epistle; and that, in connection with the duties of the members individually — duties that flowed from their positions as such. Otherwise it is the position of man in his individual responsibility before God, and this met by grace, and then the delivered man, that is set before us in the Epistle to the Romans. The directions given by the apostle extend to the Christian's relationship with the authorities under which he is placed. He recognises them as accomplishing the service of God, and as armed with authority from Him, so that resisting them would be resisting that which God had established. Conscience therefore, and not merely force, constrained the Christian to obey. In fine he was to render to every man that which was due to him in virtue of his position; to leave nothing owing to any one, be it of whatever character it might — excepting love — a debt which never can be liquidated.

Among themselves Christians are exhorted not to seek the high things of this world, but to walk as brethren with those of low degree: a precept too much forgotten in the assembly of God — to her loss. If the Christian of high degree requires that honor according to the flesh should be paid him, let it be done with good will. Happy he who, according to the example of the King of kings and to the precept of our apostle, knows how to walk in company with those of low degree in their journey through the wilderness. Now love is the fulfilling of the law; for love works no ill to his neighbor, and so fulfills the law.

Another principle acts also on the spirit of the Christian. It is time to awake. The deliverance from this present evil age, which the Lord will accomplish for us, draws nigh. The night is far spent, the day is at hand — God knows the moment. The characteristics which marked its approach in the days of the apostle have ripened in a very different way since then, although God, with a view to those whom He is gathering in, is still even now restraining them. Let us then walk as children of the day, casting off

the works of darkness. We belong to the day, of which Christ Himself will be the light. Let our walk be in accordance with that day, putting on Christ Himself, and not being studious of that which is in accordance with the will and the lusts of the flesh.

From the beginning of chapter 14 to the end of verse 7 in chapter 15 another point is taken up, to which the different positions of the Jew and Gentile gave rise. It was difficult for a Jew to rid himself of the sense of difference between days and between meats. A Gentile, having abandoned his whole religious system as idolatrous, held to nothing. Human nature is liable in this respect to sin on both sides — a want of conscience, an unbridled will, and a ceremonial conscience. Christianity recognises neither of these things. It delivers from the question of days and meats by making us heavenly with Christ. But it teaches us to bear with conscientious weakness, and to be conscientious ourselves. Conscience cannot — has not a right to — prescribe a new thing to us as a duty, but it may, through ignorance, hold to a traditional thing as obligatory. In reality we have entire liberty, but we ought to bear with weakness of faith in another, and not put a stumbling-block in his way. The apostle gives three directions in this respect: First, to receive the weak, but not for the discussion of questions that have to be settled; second, not to judge our brother, since he is Christ's servant, not ours; and every one must give account of himself to God; third, to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves; to walk in the spirit of love, and, if we are in a higher state, to show it by receiving one another, as Christ has received us, to the glory of God, which eclipses man and his petty superiorities, and which kindles charity and makes it ardent, earnest in seeking the good of others — taking us so out of self, and beyond little things, that we are able to adapt ourselves to others, where the will of God and His glory are not in question.

Many important principles are brought forward in these exhortations. Every one shall give account of himself to God. Everyone, in these cases, should be fully persuaded in his own mind, and should not judge another. If any one has faith that delivers him from traditional observances, and he sees them to be absolutely nothing — as indeed they are — let him have his faith for God, and not cause his brother to stumble.

No one lives to himself, and no one dies to himself; we are the Lord's. The weak then regard the day for the Lord's sake; the others do not regard it because of the Lord. This is the reason therefore for not judging. He whom I judge is the Lord's. Therefore also I should seek to please my brother for his edification — he is the Lord's; and I should receive him, as I have been received, to share in the glory of God which has been conferred on him. We serve Christ in these things by thinking of the good of our brother. As to the energy of a man's faith, let him have it between himself and God. Love is the ruler for the use of his liberty, if it is liberty, and not the bondage of disregarding. For the converse of this principle, when these observances are used to destroy liberty in Christ, see Galatians 4, where the apostle shows that, if the observance is taught as a principle, it is really turning back to Paganism.

These instructions close the epistle. From chapter 15:8, it is the exordium, the personal circumstances of the apostle, and salutations.

In verses 8 to 12, he sums up his thoughts respecting God's dealings with the Jew and the Gentile in the advent of Jesus. He was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to accomplish the promises made to the fathers. For to the Jews God had made promises; but none to the Gentiles. To the latter it was not truth that was in question: but by grace they might through Jesus glorify God for His mercy. For them the apostle quotes passages from Deuteronomy (that is to say, from the Law), from the Psalms, and from the Prophets.

In verse 13, he turns affectionately to the Romans to express his desires for them, and his confidence in the blessing they had received from God, which enabled them mutually to exhort one another, while expressing at the same time his boldness in some sort, because of the grace God had given him, to be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles by fulfilling a public function with regard to them; being, as it were, a priest to offer up the Gentiles as an offering acceptable to God, because sanctified by the Holy Ghost (see Numbers 8:11). This was his glory before God. This sanctification by the Holy Ghost was that which took the place of sanctification by birth, and it was well worth it.

Moreover he had accomplished his task from Jerusalem round about to Illyricum; not where Christ had been preached before, but where they had

not yet heard of Him. This had prevented his coming to Rome. But now that there was no more place for him, according to the Holy Ghost — nothing more in those parts for him to do, and having long desired to see them, he thought to visit them on his way to Spain. For the moment he was going to Jerusalem with the collection made in Macedonia and Achaia for the saints.

We see that his heart turns to the Jews; they occupied his thoughts; and while desiring to put the seal of performance on the grace which this collection betokened, he was pre-occupied with them as Jews, as those who had a claim: a mingled feeling perhaps of one who was anxious to show that he did not forget them; for, in fact, he loved his nation. We have to learn whether, in executing this service (properly that of a deacon), pleasing as it might be, he was at the height of his mission as apostle. However that might be, the hand of God was in it to make all things work for the good of His beloved servant and child, as well as for His own glory. Paul had a presentiment that it would not perhaps turn out well, and he asks the prayers of the saints at Rome, that he might be delivered from the hands of the wicked, and see their face with joy. We know how it ended: the subject was spoken of when we were considering the Acts. He saw them indeed at Rome; he was delivered, but as a prisoner; and we do not know if he ever went to Spain. The ways of God are according to His eternal counsels, and according to His grace, and according to His perfect wisdom.

Never having known the Roman Christians as an assembly, Paul sends many personal salutations. This was the link which subsisted. We see how touchingly his heart dwells upon all the details of service which attached him to those who had rendered it. He who by grace had searched into all the counsels of God, who had been admitted to see that which could not be made known to man here below, remembered all that these humble Christians — these devoted women — had done for him and for the Lord. This is love; it is the real proof of the power of the Spirit of God; it is the bond of charity.

We have also here a precious and most perfect rule for our walk, namely, to be simple concerning evil, and wise unto that which is good. Christianity alone could have given such a rule; for it provides a walk that



is positively good, and wisdom to walk in it. As Christians we may be simple concerning evil. What a deliverance! While the man of the world must needs acquaint himself with evil, in order to avoid it in this world of snares and of artifice, he must corrupt his mind, accustom himself to think of evil, in order not to be entrapped by it. But soon there should be entire deliverance — soon should Satan be trodden under their feet.

We see also that the apostle did not write his letters himself, but employed a brother to do it. Here it was one named Tertius (v. 22). Deeply concerned at the condition of the Galatians, he wrote himself the letter addressed to them; but the salutation at the end of this, as of other epistles, was in his own hand in order to verify the contents of the epistle. (1 Corinthians 16:21; 2 Thessalonians 3:17, in which the feigned epistle alluded to in 2 Thessalonians 2 gave occasion to state this proof, which he always gave, that an epistle was truly his.) We see likewise, by this little circumstance, that he attached a solemn and authoritative character to his epistles, that they were not merely the effusions of a spiritual heart, but that in writing them he knew and would have others understand, that they were worthy of consideration and of being preserved as authorities, as the expression and exercise of his apostolic mission, and were to be received as such; that is to say, as possessing the Lord's authority, with which he was furnished by the power of the Holy Ghost. They were letters from the Lord by his means, even as his words had also been (1 Thessalonians 2:13, and 1 Corinthians 14:37).

We have yet to observe, with regard to the three verses at the end of the epistle, that they are, as it were, detached from all the rest, introducing, in the form of a doxology, the suggestion of a truth, the communication of which distinguished the apostle's teaching. He does not develop it here. The task which the Holy Ghost accomplished in this epistle, was the presentation of the soul individually before God according to the divine thoughts. Nevertheless this connects itself immediately with the position of the body; and the doctrine respecting the body, the assembly, cannot be separated from it. Now the apostle informs us distinctly, that the mystery, the assembly, and the gathering together in one of all things under Christ, had been entirely unknown: God had been silent on that subject in the times which were defined by the word ages, the assembly not forming a part of that course of events, and of the ways of God on earth. But the

mystery was now revealed and communicated to the Gentiles by prophetic writings — not “the writings of the prophets.” The epistles addressed to the Gentiles possessed this character; they were prophetic writings — a fresh proof of the character of the epistles in the New Testament.

He who has understood the doctrine of this epistle, and of the writings of Paul in general, will readily apprehend the significance of this postscript. The epistle itself develops with divine perfection and fullness how a soul can stand before God in this world, and the grace and righteousness of God, maintaining withal His counsels as to Israel.

# 1 CORINTHIANS

The Epistle to the Corinthians presents very different subjects from those which occupied us in the one addressed to the Romans. We find in it moral details, and the interior order of an assembly, with regard to which the Spirit of God here displays His wisdom in a direct way. There is no mention of elders or of other functionaries of the assembly. Through the labors of the apostle a numerous assembly had been formed (for God had much people in that city) in the midst of a very corrupt population, where riches and luxury were united with a moral disorder which had made the city a proverb. At the same time, here as elsewhere, false teachers (in general, Jews) sought to undermine the influence of the apostle. The spirit of philosophy did not fail also to exercise its baneful influence, although Corinth was not, like Athens, its principal seat. Morality and the authority of the apostle were compromised together; and the state of things was most critical. The Epistle was written from Ephesus, where the tidings of the sad state of the flock at Corinth had reached the apostle, almost at the moment when he had determined to visit them on his way into Macedonia (instead of passing along the coast of Asia Minor as he did), then returning to pay them a second visit on his way back. These tidings prevented his doing so, and, instead of visiting them to pour out his heart among them, he wrote this letter. The second epistle was written in Macedonia, when Titus had brought him word of the happy effect of the first.

The subjects of this first epistle are very easily divided into their natural order. In the first place, before he blames the Christians at Corinth to whom he writes, the apostle acknowledges all the grace which God had already bestowed on them, and would still impart. Chapter 1:1-9. From verse 10 to chapter 4:21 the subject of divisions, schools of doctrine and human wisdom, is spoken of in contrast with revelation and divine wisdom. Chapter 5, the corruption of morals, and discipline, whether by power, or in the responsibility of the assembly. Chapter 6, temporal affairs, law-suits; and again the subject of fornication, which was of primary importance for the Christians of this city. Chapter 7, marriage is

considered. Ought people to marry? The obligation of those who had already married; and the case of a converted husband or of a converted wife, whose wife or whose husband was not converted. Chapter 8, should they eat things offered to idols? Chapter 9, his apostleship. Chapter 10, their condition in general, their danger of being seduced, whether by fornication, or by idolatry, and idolatrous feasts, with the principles relating thereto, which introduces the Lord's supper. Chapter 11, questions connected with their behavior in religious matters individually or (v. 17) in the assembly. Afterwards, chapter 12, the exercise of gifts, and their true value, and the object of their use, magnifying (chap. 13) the comparative value of charity; to the end of chapter 14, ordering the exercise of gifts also, with which it is compared. Chapter 15, the resurrection, which some denied, and specially that of the saints; and chapter 16, the collections for the poor in Judea, with some salutations, and the principles of subordination to those whom God has raised up for service, even where there were no elders. It is of great value to have these directions immediately from the Lord, independent of a formal organisation, so that individual conscience and that of the body as a whole should be engaged.

But there are some other considerations as to the character and structure of the epistle which I must not pass by.

The reader may remark a difference in the address in the Corinthians and Ephesians. In the Corinthians, "To the church of God," etc., "with all that in every place call on the name of the Lord Jesus." It is the professing church, the members being assumed to be faithful, at any rate in character such till put out, and with that, every one that owned Jesus as Lord, the house; hence chapter 10:1-5. In Ephesians it is "Holy and faithful brethren," and we have the proper privileges of the body. This character of the epistle, as embracing the professing church, and recognising a local assembly as representing it in the locality, gives the epistle great importance. Further, I think it will be found that the outward professing assembly is dealt with to the middle of chapter 10 (and there the nature of the Lord's supper introduces the one body of Christ, which is treated of as to the gifts of the Spirit in chapter 12); comeliness in woman's activities in the first verses of chapter 11; and afterwards from verse 17 what befits the coming together in the assembly, and the Lord's supper, with the

government of God. Verses 1-16 do not apply to the assembly. Still, order in the local assembly is everywhere the subject; only, from chapter 1 to chapter 10:14, the professing multitude is in view, supposed however sincere, but possibly not so. From chapter 10:15 to the end of chapter 12 the body is in view.

I will now turn back to take up the thread of the contents of this epistle from the beginning. Paul was an apostle by the will of God. That was his authority, however it might be with others. Moreover the same call that made those of Corinth Christians had made him an apostle. He addresses the assembly of God at Corinth, adding a character (the application of which is evident when we consider the contents of the epistle) "sanctified in Christ Jesus." Afterwards the universality of the application of the doctrine and instructions of the epistle, and of its authority over all Christians, wherever they might be, is brought forward in this address. Happily, whatever sorrow he felt at the state of the Corinthians, the apostle could fall back upon the grace of God, and thus recognise all the grace which He had bestowed on them. But the placing them thus in relationship to God brought all the effects of His holiness to bear upon their consciences, while giving the apostle's heart the encouragement of the perfect grace of God towards them. And this grace itself became a powerful lever for the word in the hearts of the Corinthians. In the presence of such grace they ought to be ashamed of sin. Nor can there be a more remarkable testimony than is here found of reckoning on the faithfulness of God towards His people. The relationship does claim holiness: in holiness alone it is enjoyed; but it reposes on the faithfulness of God. The Corinthians were walking, as we know, badly. The apostle lets none of the evil pass; but still he declares that God was faithful and would confirm them to the end that they might be — not safe, but — blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then proceeds to blame them. what a wonderful testimony!

Paul (the Spirit Himself) thus linked the Corinthians with God; and that which He was in this connection with them had all its force upon their hearts and consciences. At the same time the use of this weapon opened their heart to all that the apostle had to say. One must be very near the Lord to be able in practice thus to look at Christians who are walking badly. It is not to spare their sins — the apostle is very far from doing

that; but it is grace which brings their own consciences to be occupied with it, as having a relationship with God that was too precious to allow them to continue in sin or to permit it.

The Epistle to the Galatians supplies us with a remarkable instance of the confidence thus inspired; compare chapters 4:20; 5:10.

The Corinthians were enriched by God with His gifts, and His testimony was thus confirmed among them, so that they came behind in no gift, waiting for the revelation of the Lord, the fulfillment of all things. Solemn day! for which God, who had called them, confirmed them in His faithfulness, that they might be without reproach in that day, called as they were to the fellowship and communion of His Son Jesus Christ. Short but precious exposition of the grace and faithfulness of God, serving as a basis (if their condition did not allow the apostle to develop it as he did to the Ephesians) to all the exhortations and instructions which he addressed to the Corinthians in order to strengthen them and direct their wavering steps.

The apostle first takes up the folly of the Corinthians in making the chief christian ministers and Christ Himself heads of schools. Christ was not divided. They had not been baptised unto the name of Paul. He had indeed, on occasion, baptised a few; but his mission was to preach, not to baptise.\* It was in virtue of, and according to, Acts 26:17, and 13:2 to 4, and not Matthew 28:19. Moreover, all this human wisdom was but foolishness, which God brought to nothing: the preaching of the cross was the power of God; and God had chosen the weak things, the things of nought, foolish things according to the world, to annihilate the wisdom and strength of the world, in order that the gospel should be evidently the power of God. The Jews asked for a sign, the Greeks sought for wisdom; but God caused Christ crucified to be preached, a scandal to the Jews, foolishness to the Greeks, but to them which are called the power of God. By things that are not He brought to nought things that are, because His weakness is stronger than the strength of the world; His foolishness wiser than the wisdom of the age. The flesh shall not glory in His presence. God dealt with conscience, though in grace, according to the true position of responsible man, and did not subject Himself to the judgment and reasonings of man's mind, wholly incompetent thereto, and which put him

out of his place as if he could judge of God. But, besides this, the Christian was more even than the object of God's instruction; he was himself of God in Christ Jesus; of God he had his life, his being, his position as a Christian. And Christ was unto him, from God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption — all in contrast with the pretensions of the human mind, with the false righteousness of the Jew under the law, with the means and the measure of the sanctification it supplied, and with the weakness of man, the last trace of which God will remove in the deliverance He will accomplish by His power in Christ when He shall complete the work of His grace. Thus we are of God, and Christ is everything for us on God's part, in order that he who glories may glory in the Lord: a brief but mighty testimony to what Christianity is in its elements.

[\* This statement is the more remarkable, as he had a special revelation as to the Lord's supper. But that ordinance has reference to the unity of the body, which was specially the testimony of the apostle. The twelve were sent to baptise the nations (Matthew 28).]

It was in this spirit that Paul had come among them at first; he would know nothing but Christ,\* and Christ in His humiliation and abasement, object of contempt to senseless men. His speech was not attractive with the carnal persuasiveness of a factitious eloquence: but it was the expression of the presence and action of the Spirit, and of the power which accompanied that presence. Thus their faith rested, not on the fair words of man, which another more eloquent or more subtle might upset, but on the power of God — a solid foundation for our feeble souls — blessed be His name for it!

[\* Take notice here, that Paul does not say he would know nothing but the cross, as some persons — and even Christians — wrongly apply it. He would know nothing but Christ in contrast with philosophy among these Pagans, and Christ in the most humbled form, in order to overturn the pride of man. He goes on to inform us, that among those who were initiated into Christianity he taught wisdom, but it was the wisdom of God, revealed by Him who searches the deep things of God Himself. It is a very grievous abuse that is often made of this passage (incorrectly quoted besides).]

Nevertheless, when once the soul was taught and established in the doctrine of salvation in Christ, there was a wisdom of which the apostle spoke; not the wisdom of this present age, nor of the princes of this age, which perish, wisdom and all; but the wisdom of God in a mystery, a

secret counsel of God (revealed now by the Spirit), ordained in His settled purpose unto our glory before the world was — a counsel which, with all their wisdom, none of the princes of this world knew. Had they known it, they would not have crucified the One in whose Person it was all to be accomplished.

The apostle does not touch the subject of the mystery, because he had to feed them as babes, and only in order to put it in contrast with the false wisdom of the world; but the way in which this wisdom was communicated is important. That which had never entered into the heart of man\* God had revealed by His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. It is only the spirit of a man which is in him that knows the things which he has not communicated. So no one knows the things of God save the Spirit of God. Now it is the Spirit of God which the apostle and the other vessels of revelation had received, that they might know the things which are freely given of God. This is the knowledge of the things themselves in the vessels of revelation.

Afterwards this instrument of God was to communicate them. He did so, not in words which the art of man taught, but which the Spirit — which God — taught, communicating spiritual things by a spiritual medium.\*\* The communication was by the Spirit as well as the thing communicated. There was yet one thing wanting that this revelation might be possessed by others — the reception of these communications. This also required the action of the Spirit. The natural man did not receive them; and they are spiritually discerned.

[\* The passage is often quoted to show the things are so great one cannot know them. Whereas it is a quotation from Isaiah to show that what could not then be known (when the evil was there, and man was dealt with according to what he was) is now revealed, now that man is in glory in the Person of Christ, and the Holy Ghost come down to show us what is there. Christianity is not Judaism.]

[\*\* I have no doubt that this is the meaning of the passage. The means were of the same nature as the thing for which they were employed (v. 13).]

The source, the medium of communication, the reception, all was of the Spirit. Thus the spiritual man judges all things; he is judged of no man. The power of the Spirit in him makes his judgment true and just, but gives him motives and a walk that are unintelligible to one who has not the Spirit. Very simple as to that which is said — nothing can be more important



than that which is here taught. Alas! the Corinthians, whether when the apostle was at Corinth, or at the time of writing this letter, were not in a condition to have the mystery communicated to them — a grievous humiliation to their philosophic pride, but therefore a good remedy for it.

They were not natural men; but they were carnal (not spiritual) men, so that the apostle had to feed them with milk and not with meat which was only fit for those that were of full age. That with which they nourished their pride was a proof of this — their divisions into schools of doctrine. Paul, no doubt, had planted; Apollos watered. It was well. But it was God alone who gave the increase. Moreover the apostle had laid the foundation of this building of God, the assembly at Corinth; others had built since — had carried on the work of the edification of souls. Let every one take heed. There was but one foundation; it was laid. But in connection with it, they might teach things solid or worthless and form souls by one or the other — perhaps even introduce souls won by such vain doctrines among the saints. The work would be proved, sooner or later, by some day of trial. If they had wrought in the work of God, with solid materials, the work would stand; if not, it would come to nothing. The effect, the fruit of labor, would be destroyed — the man who had wrought be saved, because he had built on the foundation — had true faith in Christ. Yet the shaking, caused by the failure of all that he had thought genuine,\* would be apt, for himself, to shake the consciousness of his connection with, and confidence in, the foundation. He should be saved as through the fire. He who had wrought according to God should receive the fruit of his labor. If any one corrupted the temple of God — introduced that which destroyed fundamental truths, he should be destroyed himself.

[\* Remark here, the very important instruction as to the assembly viewed as God's building. In Matthew 16 we have Christ's building, and Satan's power cannot prevail against it. This building will go on till complete at the end. Hence in 1 Peter 2 and Ephesians 2 we have no workman, and the stones come, and the building grows. It is Christ's own work: He builds, and the building is not yet complete. Here it is God's building; but there is a builder, and man's responsibility comes in. There is a wise master-builder, or it may be those who build with wood, hay, and stubble — yea, even those who corrupt. In Ephesians 2 there is also a present building, but it is the fact viewed abstractedly. Here the responsibility is formally stated. The confusion of Christ's building (not yet finished) and man's building, the applying the promise made to one to the other which rests on man's responsibility and is a present building on earth, is one grand source of Popish and Puseyite errors. Against Christ's work nothing can

prevail. Man may build with wood and hay and stubble, and his work be destroyed, as it will.]

The subject then is ministerial labor, carried on by means of certain doctrines, either good, worthless, or subversive of the truth; and the fruits which this labor would produce. And there are three cases; the work good as well as the workman; the work vain, but the workman saved; the corrupter of God's temple — here the workman would be destroyed.

Finally, if any one desired to be wise in this world, let him become unintelligent in order to be wise. God counted the wisdom of the wise as foolishness, and would take them in their own craftiness. But in this the saints were below their privileges. All things were theirs, since they were the children of God. "All things are yours" — Paul, Apollos, all things — you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

As for the apostle and the laborers, they were to consider them as stewards employed by the Lord. And it was to Him that Paul committed the judgment of his conduct. He cared little for the judgment man might form respecting him. He was not conscious of anything wrong, but that did not justify him. He who judged (examined) him was the Lord. And, after all, who was it that gave to the one or to the other that which he could use in service?

Paul had thought well, in treating this subject, to use names that they were using in their carnal divisions, and those, especially himself and Apollos, which could not be used to pretend he was getting rid of others to set up himself; but what was the real state of the case? They had despised the apostle. Yes, he says, we have been put to shame, despised, persecuted, in distress; you have been at ease, like kings — a reproach in accordance with their own pretensions, their own reproaches — a reproach that touched them to the quick, if they had any feeling left. Paul and his companions had been as the offscouring of the earth for Christ's sake, while the Corinthians were reposing in the lap of luxury and ease. Even while writing to them, this was still his position. "Would to God," he says, "ye did reign" (that the day of Christ were come) "in order that we might reign with you." He felt his sufferings, although he bore them joyfully. They, the apostles, were set forth on God's part as though to be the last great spectacle in those marvelous games of which this world was the

amphitheatre; and as His witnesses they were exposed to the fury of a brutal world. Patience and meekness were their only weapons.

Nevertheless he did not say these things to put them to shame, he warned them as his beloved sons; for his sons they were. Though they might have ten thousand teachers, he had begotten them all by the gospel. Let them then follow him. In all this there is the deep working of the affection of a noble heart, wounded to the utmost, but wounded in order to bring out an affection that rose above his grief. It is this which so strikingly distinguishes the work of the Spirit in the New Testament, as in Christ Himself. The Spirit has come into the bosom of the assembly, takes part in her afflictions — her difficulties. He fills the soul of one who cares for the assembly,\* making him feel that which is going on — feel it according to God, but with a really human heart. Who could cause all this to be felt for strangers, except the Spirit of God? Who would enter into these things with all the perfection of the wisdom of God, in order to act upon the heart, to deliver the conscience, to form the understanding, and to set it free, except the Spirit of God? Still the apostolic individual bond was to be formed, to be strengthened. It was the essence of the work of the Holy Ghost in the assembly to bind all together in this way. We see the man: otherwise it would not have been Paul and his dear brethren. We see the Holy Ghost, whom the latter had grieved, no doubt, and who acts in the former with divine wisdom, to guide them in the right way with all the affection of their father in Christ. Timothy, his son in the faith and in heart, might meet the case. Paul had sent him; Paul himself would soon be there. Some said, No, he would not, and took occasion to magnify themselves in the absence of the apostle; but he would come himself and put everything to the test; for the kingdom of God was not in word, but in power. Did they wish him to come with a rod, or in love?

[\* “The Spirit joins also its help to our weakness,” Romans 8:26.]

Here this part of the epistle ends. Admirable specimen of tenderness and of authority! of authority sure enough of itself on the part of God, to be able to act with perfect tenderness towards those who were thoroughly dear to him, in the hope of not being forced to exercise itself in another way. The most powerful truths are unfolded in so doing.

**CHAPTER 5.** He begins to treat the details of conduct and of discipline; and, first of all, the carnal defilement carried on in their midst to the last degree of hardness of conscience. Those who sought their own personal influence as teachers allowed them to go on in it. He condemns it without reservation. Discipline follows; for Christ had been offered up as the Paschal Lamb, and they were to keep the feast without leaven, keeping themselves from the old leaven; in order that they might be in fact, what they were before God — an unleavened lump. As to discipline, it was this: before they knew that it was their duty to cut off the wicked person, and that God had given them the power and imposed on them the obligation to do so, a moral sense of evil ought, at least, to have led them to humble themselves before God, and to pray that He would take him away. On the contrary, they were puffed up with pride. But now the apostle teaches them what must be done, and enforces it with all his apostolic authority. He was among them in spirit if not in body, and with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, they being gathered together, to deliver such a one to Satan; but as a brother for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit might be saved in the day of Christ.

Here all the power of the assembly in its normal condition, united to and led by the apostolic energy, is displayed. Its members; the apostle, vessel and channel of the power of the Spirit; and the power of the Lord Jesus Himself, the Head of the body. Now the world is the theatre of Satan's power; the assembly, delivered from his power, is the habitation of God by the Spirit. If the enemy had succeeded in drawing aside by the flesh a member of Christ, so that he dishonors the Lord by walking after the flesh as men of the world do, he is put outside, and by the power of the Spirit, as then exercised in their midst by the apostle, delivered up to the enemy, who is in spite of himself the servant of the purposes of God (as in the case of Job), in order that the flesh of the Christian (which, from his not being able to reckon it dead, had brought him morally under the power of Satan) should be physically destroyed and broken down. Thus would he be set free from the illusions in which the flesh held him captive. His mind would learn how to discern the difference between good and evil, to know what sin was. The judgment of God would be realised within him, and would not be executed upon him at that day when it would be definitive for the condemnation of those who should undergo it. This was a great

blessing, although its form was terrible. Marvellous example of the government of God, which uses the adversary's enmity against the saints as an instrument for their spiritual blessing! We have such a case fully set before us in the history of Job. Only we have here, in addition, the proof that in its normal state, apostolic power\* being there, the assembly exercised this judgment herself, having discernment by the Spirit and the authority of Christ to do it. Moreover, whatever may be the spiritual capacity of the assembly to wield this sword of the Lord (for this is power), her positive and ordinary duty is stated at the end of the chapter.

[\* The apostle (1 Timothy 1:20) exercises this power alone as to certain blasphemers. It is power, not mere duty, and it is important clearly to distinguish the two: though the apostle here did it in and with the gathered assembly, yet he says, "I have judged already to deliver such an one to Satan. In verse 13 we have the positive duty of the assembly without the question of special power.]

The assembly was an unleavened lump, looked at in the Spirit as an assembly, and not individually. It is thus that we must view it, for it is only in the Spirit that it is so. The assembly is seen of God as being before Him in the new nature in Christ. Such she ought to be in practice by the power of the Spirit, in spite of the existence of the flesh, which by faith she ought to count as dead, and allow nothing in her walk that is contrary to this state. The assembly ought to be a "new lump," and was not if evil was allowed, and, consequently, ought to purge herself from the old leaven, because she is unleavened in God's thoughts. Such is her position before God. For Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us: therefore we ought to keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. They did wrong therefore in boasting while this evil was in their midst, however great their gifts might be. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. The evil did not attach to that man alone who was personally guilty of it. The assembly was not clear till the evil was put out (2 Corinthians 7:11). They could not dissociate themselves in the intercourse of ordinary life from all those who, in the world, walked corruptly, for in that case they would have to go out of the world. But if any one called himself a brother and walked in this corruption, with such a one they ought not even to eat. God judges those who are outside. The assembly must herself judge those that are within, and put out whatever must be called "wicked."

**CHAPTER 6:** 1-11 treats the subject of wrongs. It was shameful that those who were to judge the world and the angels should be incapable of judging the paltry affairs of this world. Let the least esteemed in the assembly be employed in this service. Rather should they bear the wrong, whereas they did wrong themselves. But the wicked and the unrighteous would assuredly not inherit the kingdom. What a wonderful mixture we have here of astonishing revelations, of a morality that is unchangeable whatever may be the divine supremacy of grace, and of ecclesiastical order and discipline! The assembly is united to Christ. When He shall judge the world and pronounce the doom of the angels, she will be associated with Him and take part in His judgment, for she has His Spirit and His mind. Nothing however that is unrighteous shall enter into that kingdom, for in effect how could evil be judged by any that took pleasure in it? Christians should not go to a worldly tribunal for justice, but have recourse to the arbitration of the brethren — a service which, as entering so little into christian spirituality, was suited to the weakest among them. Moreover the proper thing was rather to suffer the wrong. Be it as it might, the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom.

Judaism, which took pleasure in a carnal sanctity of outward regulations, and the spirit of the world with conformity to its ways, were the two dangers that threatened the assembly at Corinth — dangers, indeed, which exist for the heart of man at all times and in all places. With regard to meats the rule is simple: perfect liberty, since all is allowed — true liberty, in that we are in bondage to none of these things. Meats and the belly, as in relationship to each other, should both perish; the body has a higher destiny — it is for the Lord, and the Lord for it. God has raised up Christ from the dead, and He will raise us up again by His power. The body belongs to this and not to meats.

But the doctrine that the body is for Christ decided another question, to which the depraved habits of the Corinthians gave rise. All fornication is forbidden. To us, with our present Christian habits of mind, it is a thing of course — to Pagans, new; but the doctrine exalts every subject. Our bodies are the members of Christ. Another truth connected with this is of great importance: if (by union according to the flesh) two were one body, he who is united to the Lord is one spirit. The Spirit whose fullness is in

Christ is the same Spirit who dwells in me and unites me to Him. Our bodies are His temples. What a mighty truth when we think of it!

Moreover we are not our own, but were bought with a price — the blood of Christ offered for us. Therefore we ought to glorify God in our bodies, which are His — powerful and universal motive, governing the whole conduct without exception. Our true liberty is to belong to God. All that is for oneself is stolen from the rights of Him who has bought us for His own. All that a slave was, or gained, was the property of his master; he was not the owner of himself. Thus it was with the Christian. Outside that, he is the wretched slave of sin and of Satan — selfishness his rule, and eternal banishment from the source of love his end. Horrible thought! In Christ we are the special objects and the vessels of that love. We have here two mighty motives for holiness: the value of Christ's blood, at which we are purchased; also the fact that we are the temples of the Holy Ghost.

**CHAPTER 7.** The apostle proceeds by answering a question in connection with the subject he had been treating — the will of God with regard to the relationship between man and woman. They do well who remain outside this relationship in order to walk with the Lord according to the Spirit, and not to yield in anything to their nature. God had instituted marriage — woe to him who should speak ill of it! but sin has come in, and all that is of nature, of the creature, is marred. God has introduced a power altogether above and outside nature — that of the Spirit. To walk according to that power is the best thing; it is to walk outside the sphere in which sin acts. But it is rare; and positive sins are for the most part the effect of standing apart from that which God has ordained according to nature. In general then for this reason, every man should have his own wife: and the union once formed, he had no longer power over himself. As to the body, the husband belonged to his wife, the wife to her husband. If, by mutual consent, they separated for awhile that they might give themselves to prayer and to spiritual exercises, the bond was to be immediately acknowledged again, lest the heart, not governing itself, should give Satan occasion to come in and distress the soul, and destroy its confidence in God and in His love — lest he should tempt by distressing doubts (it is for, not by incontinency) a heart that aimed at too much, and failed in it.

This permission, however, and this direction which recommended Christians to marry, was not a commandment from the Lord, given by inspiration, but the fruit of the apostle's experience — an experience to which the presence of the Holy Ghost was not wanting.\* He would rather that every one were like himself; but every one had, in this respect, his gift from God. To the unmarried and the widows, it is good, he says, to abide as he himself was; but if they could not subdue their nature and remain in calm purity, it was better to marry. Unsubduedness of desire was more hurtful than the bond of marriage. But as to marriage itself, there was no longer room for the counsel of experience, the commandment of the Lord was positive. The woman was not to separate from the man, nor the man from the woman; and if they separated, the bond was not broken; they must remain unmarried or else be reconciled.

[\* Note here, we have formally distinguished, what infidels of the modern school have sought to confound, spiritual thoughts as a man, and inspiration. The apostle gives his thoughts and judgment as a spiritual man, his mind animated and guided by the Spirit, and contrasts it with inspiration and what the Lord said. How wonderfully the Lord has provided in scripture for everything! Compare verse 25.]

But there was a case more complicated, when the man was converted and the wife unconverted, or vice versa. According to the law a man who had married a woman of the Gentiles (and was consequently profane and unclean) defiled himself, and was compelled to send her away; and their children had no right to Jewish privileges; they were rejected as unclean (see Ezra 10:3). But under grace it was quite the contrary. The converted husband sanctified the wife, and vice versa, and their children were reckoned clean before God; they had part in the ecclesiastical rights of their parent. This is the sense of the word "holy," in connection with the question of order and of outward relationship towards God, which was suggested by the obligation under the law to send away wife and children in a similar case. Thus the believer was not to send away his wife, nor to forsake an unbelieving husband. If the unbeliever forsook the believer definitively, the latter (man or woman) was free — "let him depart." The brother was no longer bound to consider the one who had forsaken him as his wife, nor the sister the man who had forsook her as her husband. But they were called to peace, and not to seek this separation, for how did the believer know if he should not be the means of the unbeliever's



conversion? For we are under grace. Moreover every one was to walk as God had distributed to him.

As regarded occupations and positions in this world, the general rule was that every one should continue in the state wherein he was called; but it must be “with God” — doing nothing that would not be to His glory. If the state was in itself of a nature contrary to His will, it was sin; clearly he could not remain in it with God. But the general rule was to remain and glorify God in it.

The apostle had spoken of marriage, of the unmarried and of widows; he had been questioned also with respect to those who had never entered into any relationship with woman. On this point he had no commandment from the Lord. He could only give his judgment as one who had received mercy of the Lord to be faithful. It was good to remain in that condition, seeing what the world was and the difficulties of a christian life. If they were bound to a wife, let them not seek to be loosed. If free, they would do well to remain so. Thus if they married, they did well; not marrying, they did better. He who had not known a woman did not sin if he married, but he should have trouble after the flesh in his life here below. (It will be observed, that it is not the daughter of a Christian that is here spoken of, but his own personal condition.) If he stood firm, and had power over his own will, it was the better way; if he married, he still did well; if he did not marry, it was better. It was the same with a woman; and if the apostle said that according to his judgment it was better, he had the Spirit of God. His experience — if he had no commandment — had not been gained without the Spirit, but it was that of a man who could say (if any one had a right to say it) that he had the Spirit of God.

Moreover the time was short: the married were to be as having no wives; buyers, as having no possession; they who used the world, not using it as though it were theirs. Only the apostle would have them without carefulness or distraction, that they might serve the Lord. If by reckoning themselves dead to nature this effect was not produced, they gained nothing, they lost by it. When married they were pre-occupied with things below, in order to please their wives and to provide for their children. But they enjoyed a repose of mind, in which nature did not claim her rights with a will that they had failed to silence, and holiness of walk and of heart

was maintained. If the will of nature was subjugated and silenced, they served the Lord without distraction, they lived according to the Spirit and not according to nature, even in those things which God had ordained as good with respect to nature.

As to the slave, he might console himself as being the Lord's free-man; but (seeing the difficulty of reconciling the will of a pagan or even an unspiritual master with the will of God) if he could be made free, he should embrace the opportunity.

Two things strike us here in passing: the holiness which all these directions breathe with regard to that which touches so closely the desires of the flesh. The institutions of God, formed for man when innocent, are maintained in all their integrity, in all their authority, a safeguard now against the sin to which man is incited by his flesh. The Spirit introduces a new energy above nature, which in no wise weakens the authority of the institution. If any one can live above nature in order to serve the Lord in freedom, it is a gift of God — a grace which he does well to profit by. A second very important principle flows from this chapter. The apostle distinguishes accurately between that which he has by inspiration, and his own spiritual experience — that which the Spirit gave him in connection with the exercises of his individual life — spiritual wisdom, however exalted it might be. On certain points he had no commandment from the Lord. He gave the conclusion at which he had arrived, through the help of the Spirit of God, in a life of remarkable faithfulness, and aided by the Spirit whom he but little grieved. But it was not a commandment of the Lord. On other points that which he did not except in this manner was to be received as the commandment of the Lord (compare chap. 14:37). That is to say, he affirms the inspiration, properly so called, of his writings — they were to be received as emanating from the Lord Himself — distinguishing this inspiration from his own spiritual competency, a principle of all importance.

After this the apostle answers (chap. 8) the question respecting meats offered to idols, which gives occasion to a few words on the value of knowledge. Simply as knowledge, it is worth nothing. If we look at it as knowledge that we possess, it does but puff us up; it is something in me, my knowledge. True christian knowledge unfolded something in God. By

means of that which is revealed, God, better known, became greater to the soul. It was in Him the thing known, and not a knowledge in me by which I made myself greater. He who loves God is known of Him. As to the question itself, love decided it. Since such a question had arisen, it was evident that all consciences were not brought into full light by spiritual intelligence. Now undoubtedly the idol was nothing: there was but one God, the Father; and one Lord, Jesus Christ. But if he who was strong sat at meat in the idol's temple, another who had not full light would be encouraged to do the same, and his conscience would be unfaithful and defiled. Thus I lead into sin, and, as far as depends on me, I ruin a brother for whom Christ died. I sin against Christ Himself in so doing. Thus, if meat causes a brother to stumble, let me altogether abstain from it rather than be a snare to him. Here the apostle treats the question as arising among the brethren, so as that which regards the conscience of each, choosing to maintain in all its force that in fact an idol was nothing but a piece of wood or stone. It was important to set the question on this ground. The prophets had done so before. But this was not all that there was to say. There was the working of Satan and of wicked spirits to explain, and this he does further on.

We may remark in passing the expression, "To us there is but one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ." The apostle does not here treat the abstract question of the Lord's divinity, but the connection of men with that which was above them in certain relationships. Pagans had many gods, and many lords, intermediate beings. Not so Christians. For them is the Father abiding in the absoluteness of the divinity, and Christ who, become man, has taken the place and the relationship of Lord towards us. The position, and not the nature, is the subject. It is the same thing in chapter 12:2-6, where the contrast is with the multitude of spirits whom the Pagans knew, and the number of gods and lords. Nevertheless every one was not, in fact, thus delivered from the influence of false gods on his imagination. They were still perhaps, in spite of himself, something to him. He had conscience of the idol, and if he ate that which had been offered to it, it was not to him simply that which God had given for food. The idea of the existence of a real and powerful being had a place in his heart, and thus his conscience was defiled. Now they were not better in God's sight for having eaten, and by eating they had put a stumbling block

in their brother's way, and, so far as the act of those who had full light was concerned, had ruined him by defiling his conscience and estranging him from God in unfaithfulness. This was sinning against Christ, who had died for that precious soul. If God intervened to shield him from the result of this unfaithfulness, that in nowise diminished the sin of him who led the weak one to act against his conscience. In itself that which separates us from God ruins us in that which regards our responsibility. Thus he who has the love of Christ in his heart would rather never eat meat than do that which would make a brother unfaithful, and tend to ruin a soul which Christ has redeemed.

The apostle was exposed to the accusations of false teachers, who asserted that he carried on his evangelisation and his labors from interested motives, and that he took the property of Christians, availing himself of their devotedness. He speaks therefore of his ministry. He declares openly that he is an apostle, an eye-witness of the glory of Christ, having seen the Lord. Moreover, if he was not an apostle to others, doubtless he was to the Corinthians, for he had been the means of their conversion. Now the will of the Lord was that they who preached the gospel should live of the gospel. He had a right to take with him a sister as his wife, even as Peter did, and the brethren of the Lord. Nevertheless he had not used this right. Obligated by the call of the Lord to preach the gospel, woe unto him if he failed to do it! His glory was to do it gratuitously, so as to take away all occasion from those who sought it. For, being free from all, he had made himself the servant of all, that he might win as many as he could. Observe that this was in his service; it was not accommodating himself to the world, in order to escape the offense of the cross. He put this plainly forward (chap. 2:2); but in preaching it, he adapted himself to the religious capacity and to the modes of thought belonging to the one and to the other, in order to gain access for the truth into their minds; and he did the same in his manner of conduct among them. It was the power of charity which denied itself in all things, in order to be the servant of all, and not the selfishness which indulged itself under the pretense of gaining others. He did so in every respect for the sake of the gospel, desiring, as he said, to be a partaker with it, for he personifies it as doing the work of God's love in the world.

It was thus they should run; and, in order to run thus, one must deny oneself. In this way the apostle acted. He did not run with uncertain steps, as one who did not see the true end, or who did not pursue it seriously as a known thing. He knew well what he was pursuing, and he pursued it really, evidently, according to its nature. Every one could judge by his walk. He did not trifle as a man who beats the air-easy prowess. In seeking that which was holy and glorious, he knew the difficulties he resisted in the personal conflict with the evil that sought to obstruct his victory. As a vigorous wrestler, he kept under his body, which would have hindered him. There was reality in his pursuit of heaven: he would tolerate nothing that opposed it. Preaching to others was not all. He might do that, and it might be, as regards himself, labor in vain; he might lose everything — be rejected afterwards himself, if not personally a Christian. He was a Christian first of all, then a preacher, and a good preacher, because he was a Christian first. Thus, also (for the beginning of chapter 10 connects itself with the close of chapter 9), others might make a profession, partake of the initiatory and other ordinances, as he might be a preacher, and after all not be owned of God. This warning is a testimony to the condition to which, in part at least, the assembly of God was already reduced: a warning always useful, but which supposes that those who bear the name of Christian, and have partaken of the ordinances of the church, no longer inspire that confidence which would receive them without question as the true sheep of Christ. The passage distinguishes between participation in christian ordinances and the possession of salvation: a distinction always true, but which it is not necessary to make when christian life is bright in those who have part in the outward privileges of the assembly.

**CHAPTER 10.** The apostle then gives the Corinthians the ways of God with Israel in the wilderness, as instruction with regard to His ways with us, declaring that the things which happened to them were types or figures which serve as patterns for us: an important principle, and one which ought to be clearly apprehended, in order to profit by it. It is not Israel who is the figure, but that which happened to Israel — the ways of God with Israel. The things themselves happened to Israel; they were written for our instruction who find ourselves at the close of God's dispensations. That which shall follow will be the judgment of God, when these examples will no longer serve for the life of faith.

Two principles are next established which also have great practical importance: “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” This is our responsibility. On the other side we have the faithfulness of God. He does not permit us to be tempted beyond our strength, but provides a way of escape in order that we may not stumble.

He enjoins, with regard to idolatry, that holy fear which avoids the occasion of doing evil, the occasion of falling. There is association and communion through the table of which we partake with that which is on it; and we Christians, being many, are but one bread and one body,\* inasmuch as we share the same bread at the Lord’s supper. Those in Israel who ate of the sacrifices were partakers of the altar — were identified with it. So those who ate of idol’s meat as such were identified with the idol it was offered to. Was this to say that the idol was anything? No. But as it is written (Deuteronomy 32), “The things which the Gentiles offered, they offered to demons and not to God.” Should a Christian then, partake of the table of demons? The table was the table of demons, the cup the cup of demons — an important principle for the assembly of God. Would one provoke the Lord by putting Him on a level with demons? Allusion is again made to Deuteronomy 32:21. The apostle repeats his principle already established, that he had liberty in every respect, but that on the one hand he would not put himself under the power of anything; on the other, being free, he would use his liberty for the spiritual good of all. To follow out this rule, these are his instructions: Whatsoever was sold in the market they should eat without question of conscience. If any man said, “This was sacrificed to idols,” it was a proof that he had conscience of an idol. They should then not eat of it, because of his conscience. For as to him who was free, his liberty could not be judged by the conscience of the other; for, as to doctrine, and where there was knowledge, the apostle recognises it as a truth that the idol was nothing. The creature was simply the creature of God. Communion with that which was false I ought to avoid for myself, especially in that which relates to communion with God Himself. I should deny myself the liberty which the truth gave me, rather than wound the weak conscience of others.

[\* It is here the apostle comes to the inner circle of the body of Christ, the true assembly of God united together by the Holy Ghost, of which the Lord’s supper is the expression.]

Moreover in all things, even in eating or drinking, we ought to see the glory of God, and do all to His glory; giving no offense by using our liberty, either to Jew or Gentile, or the assembly of God; following the apostle's example, who, denying himself, sought to please all for their edification.

Having given these rules in answer to questions of detail, he turns to that which regarded the presence and action of the Holy Ghost; which also introduces the subject of the conduct proper for them in their assemblies.

Observe here the way in which the apostle grounded his replies with regard to details on the highest and fundamental principles. This is the manner of Christianity (compare Titus 2:10-14). He introduces God and charity, putting man in connection with God Himself. In that which follows we have also a striking example of this. The subject is a direction for women.

They were not to pray without having their heads covered. To decide this question, simply of what was decent and becoming, the apostle lays open the relationship and the order of the relationship subsisting between the depositories of God's glory and Himself,\* and brings in the angels, to whom Christians, as a spectacle set before them, should present that of order according to the mind of God. The head of the woman is the man; that of man is Christ; of Christ, God. This is the order of power, ascending to Him who is supreme. And then, with respect to their relationship to each other, he adds, the man was not created for the woman, but the woman for the man. And as to their relations with other creatures, intelligent and conscious of the order of the ways of God, they were to be covered because of the angels, who are spectators of the ways of God in the dispensation of redemption, and of the effect which this marvelous intervention was to produce. Elsewhere (see note below) it is added, in reference to the history of that which took place, the man was not deceived; but the woman, being deceived, transgressed first. Let us add — from the passage we are considering — that, as to creation, the man was not taken from the woman, but the woman from the man. Nevertheless the man is not without the woman, nor the woman without the man, in the Lord; but all things are of God; and all this to regulate a question of modesty as to women, when in praying they were before the eyes of others.\*\* The result — in that which concerns the details — is that the

man was to have his head uncovered, because he represented authority, and in this respect was invested (as to his position) with the glory of God, of whom he was the image. The woman was to have her head covered, as a token that she was subject to the man (her covering being a token of the power to which she was subject). Man however could not do without woman, nor woman without man. Finally the apostle appeals to the order of creation, according to which a woman's hair, her glory and ornament, showed, in contrast with the hair of man, that she was not made to present herself with the boldness of man before all. Given as a veil, her hair showed that modesty, submission — a covered head that hid itself, as it were, in that submission and in that modesty — was her true position, her distinctive glory. Moreover, if any one contested the point, it was a custom which neither the apostle nor the assemblies allowed.

[\* In 1 Timothy 2:11-15 the moral effect of the circumstances of the fall is introduced, as giving the woman her true place in the assembly with regard to man.]

[\*\* We are not as yet come to the order in the assembly. That commences with verse 17.]

Observe also here that, however man may have fallen, divine order in creation never loses its value as the expression of the mind of God. Thus also in James, man is said to be created in the image of God. As to his moral condition, he needs (now that he has knowledge of good and of evil) to be born again, created in righteousness and in true holiness, that he may be the image of God as now revealed through Christ; but his position in the world, as the head and center of all things — which no angel has been — is the idea of God Himself, as well as the position of the woman, the companion of his glory but subject to him; an idea which will be gloriously accomplished in Christ, and with respect to the woman in the assembly; but which is true in itself, being the constituted order of God, and always right as such: for the ordinance of God creates order, although, no doubt, His wisdom and His perfection are displayed in it.

The reader will remark, that this order in creation, as well as that which is established in the counsels of God in respect of the woman, of the man, of Christ, and of God Himself, and the fact that men — at least Christians under redemption — are a spectacle to angels (compare chap. 4:9), subjects which here I can only indicate, have the highest interest.\*



[\* The first chapter of Genesis gives us man in his place in creation as from God the Creator; the second, his own relationship with Jehovah God, where he was placed in connection with Him, and the woman's with himself.]

The apostle afterwards touches upon the subject of their assemblies. In verse 2 he had praised them; but on this point he could not do so (v. 17). Their assemblies manifested a spirit of division. This division concerned the distinction between the rich and the poor, but, as it seems, gave rise to others: at least others were necessary to make manifest those who were really approved of God. Now these divisions had the character of sects; that is to say, particular opinions divided Christians of the same assembly, of the assembly of God, into schools; they were hostile to each other, although they took the Lord's supper together — if indeed it could be said that they took it together. Jealousies that had arisen between the rich and the poor tended to foster the sectarian division. If, I observed, it could be said that they broke bread together; for each one took care to eat his own supper before the others did so, and some were hungry while others took their fill. This was not really eating the Lord's supper.

The apostle, guided by the Holy Ghost, seizes the opportunity to declare to them the nature and the import of this ordinance. We may notice here, that the Lord had taught it him by an especial revelation — proof of the interest that belongs to it,\* and that it is a part of the Lord's mind in the entire christian walk, to which He attaches importance in view of our moral condition, and of the state of our spiritual affections individually, as well as those of the assembly. In the joy of christian liberty, amid the powerful effects of the presence of the Holy Ghost — of the gifts by which He manifested Himself in the assembly, the Lord's death, His broken body, was brought to mind, and, as it were, made present to faith as the basis and foundation of everything. This act of love, this simple and solemn deed, weak and empty in appearance, preserved all its importance. The Lord's body had been offered for us! to which the Holy Ghost Himself was to bear witness, and which was to maintain all its importance in the Christian's heart, and to be the foundation and center of the edifice of the assembly. Whatever might be the power that shone forth in the assembly, the heart was brought back to this. The body of the Lord Himself had been offered,\*\* the lips of Jesus had claimed our remembrance. This moral equilibrium is very important to saints. Power, and the exercise of gifts do not necessarily act upon the conscience and the

heart of those to whom they are committed, nor of those always who enjoy their display. And, although God is present (and when we are in a good state, that is felt), still it is a man who speaks and who acts upon others; he is prominent. In the Lord's supper the heart is brought back to a point in which it is entirely dependent, in which man is nothing, in which Christ and His love are everything, in which the heart is exercised, and the conscience remembers that it has needed cleansing, and that it has been cleansed by the work of Christ — that we depend absolutely on this grace. The affections also are in the fullest exercise. It is important to remember this. The consequences that followed forgetfulness of the import of this ordinance confirmed its importance and the Lord's earnest desire that they should take heed to it. The apostle is going to speak of the power of the Holy Ghost manifested in His gifts, and of the regulations necessary to maintain order and provide for edification where they were exercised in the assembly; but, before doing so, he places the Lord's supper as the moral center, the object of the assembly. Let us remark some of the thoughts of the Spirit in connection with this ordinance.

[\* This connects itself too with the fact that it is the expression of the unity of the body — truth specially committed to the apostle. On the other hand, he was not sent to baptise. That was mere admission to the house already formed, and to which the apostle had been admitted like others.]

[\*\* The best MSS. omit "broken"; but it is the memorial of Christ slain, and His precious blood poured out.]

First, He links the affections with it in the strongest way. It was the same night on which Jesus was betrayed that He left this memorial of His sufferings and of His love. As the paschal lamb brought to mind the deliverance which the sacrifice offered in Egypt had procured for Israel, thus the Lord's supper called to mind the sacrifice of Christ. He is in the glory, the Spirit is given; but they were to remember Him. His offered body was the object before their hearts in this memorial. Take notice of this word "Remember." It is not a Christ as He now exists, it is not the realisation of what He is: that is not a remembrance — His body is now glorified. It is a remembrance of what He was on the cross. It is a body slain, and blood shed, not a glorified body. It is remembered, though, by those who are now united to Him in the glory into which He is entered. As risen and associated with Him in glory, they look back to that blessed work of love, and His love in it which gave them a place there. They drink

also of the cup in remembrance of Him. In a word, it is Christ looked at as dead: there is not such a Christ now.

It is the remembrance of Christ Himself. It is that which attaches to Himself, it is not only the value of His sacrifice, but attachment to Himself, the remembrance of Himself. The apostle then shows us, if it is a dead Christ, who it is that died. Impossible to find two words, the bringing together of which has so important a meaning, The death of the Lord. How many things are comprised in that He who is called the Lord had died! What love! what purposes! what efficacy! what results! The Lord Himself gave Himself up for us. We celebrate His death. At the same time, it is the end of God's relations with the world on the ground of man's responsibility, except the judgment. This death has broken every link — has proved the impossibility of any. We show forth this death until the rejected Lord shall return, to establish new bonds of association by receiving us to Himself to have part in them. It is this which we proclaim in the ordinance when we keep it. Besides this, it is in itself a declaration that the blood on which the new covenant is founded has been already shed; it was established in this blood. I do not go beyond that which the passage presents; the object of the Spirit of God here, is to set before us, not the efficacy of the death of Christ, but that which attaches the heart to Him in remembering His death, and the meaning of the ordinance itself. It is a dead, betrayed Christ whom we remember. The offered body was, as it were, before their eyes at this supper. The shed blood of the Savior claimed the affections of their heart for Him. They were guilty of despising these precious things, if they took part in the supper unworthily. The Lord Himself fixed our thoughts there in this ordinance, and in the most affecting way, at the very moment of His betrayal.

But if Christ attracted the heart thus to fix its attention there, discipline was also solemnly exercised in connection with this ordinance. If they despised the broken body and the blood of the Lord by taking part in it lightly, chastisement was inflicted. Many had become sick and weak, and many had fallen asleep, that is, had died. It is not the being worthy to partake that is spoken of, but the partaking in an unworthy manner. Every Christian, unless some sin had excluded him, was worthy to partake because he was a Christian. But a Christian might come to it without judging himself, or appreciating as he ought that which the supper brought

to his mind, and which Christ had connected with it. He did not discern the Lord's body; and he did not discern, did not judge, the evil in himself. God cannot leave us thus careless. If the believer judges himself, the Lord will not judge him; if we do not judge ourselves, the Lord judges; but when the Christian is judged, he is chastened of the Lord that he may not be condemned with the world. It is the government of God in the hands of the Lord who judges His own house: an important and too much forgotten truth. No doubt the result of all is according to the counsels of God, who displays in it all His wisdom, His patience, and the righteousness of His ways; but this government is real. He desires the good of His people in the end; but He will have holiness, a heart whose condition answers to that which He has revealed (and He has revealed Himself), a walk which is its expression. The normal state of a Christian is communion, according to the power of that which has been revealed. Is there failure in this — communion is lost, and with it the power to glorify God, a power found nowhere else. But if one judges oneself, there is restoration: the heart being cleansed from the evil by judging it, communion is restored. If one does not judge oneself, God must interpose and correct and cleanse us by discipline — discipline which may even be unto death (see Job 33, 36; 1 John 5:16; James 5:14, 15).

There are yet one or two remarks to be made. To “judge” oneself, is not the same word as to be “judged” of the Lord. It is the same that is used in chapter 11:29, “discerning the Lord's body.” Thus, what we have to do is not only to judge an evil committed, it is to discern one's condition, as it is manifested in the light — even as God Himself is in the light — by walking in it. This prevents our falling into evil either in act or thought. But if we have fallen, it is not enough to judge the action; it is ourselves we must judge, and the state of heart, the tendency, the neglect, which occasioned our falling into the evil — in a word, that which is not communion with God or that which hinders it. It was thus the Lord dealt with Peter. He did not reproach him for his fault, He judged its root.

Moreover the assembly ought to have power to discern these things. God acts in this way, as we have seen in Job; but the saints have the mind of Christ by the Spirit of Christ, and ought to discern their own condition.

The foundation and center of all this, is the position in which we stand towards Christ in the Lord's supper, as the visible center of communion and the expression of His death; in which sin, all sin, is judged. Now we are in connection with this holy judgment of sin as our portion. We cannot mingle the death of Christ with sin. It is, as to its nature and efficacy, of which the full result will in the end be manifested, the total putting away of sin. It is the divine negation of sin. He died to sin, and that in love to us. It is the absolute holiness of God made sensible and expressed to us in that which took place with regard to sin. It is absolute devotedness to God for His glory in this respect. To bring sin or carelessness into it, is to profane the death of Christ, who died rather than allow sin to subsist before God. We cannot be condemned with the world, because He has died and has put away sin for us; but to bring sin to that which represents this very death in which He suffered for sin is a thing which cannot be born. God vindicates that which is due to the holiness and the love of a Christ who gave up His life to put away sin. One cannot say, I will not go to the table; that is, I will accept the sin and give up the confession of the value of that death. We examine ourselves, and we go; we re-establish the rights of His death in our conscience — for all is pardoned and expiated as to guilt, and we go to acknowledge these rights as the proof of infinite grace.

The world is condemned. Sin in the Christian is judged, it escapes neither the eye nor the judgment of God. He never permits it; He cleanses the believer from it by chastening him, although He does not condemn, because Christ has born his sins, and been made sin for him. The death of Christ forms then the center of communion in the assembly, and the touchstone of conscience, and that, with respect to the assembly, in the Lord's supper.

The other branch of the truth, in reference to the assembly of God in general and to the assemblies, is the presence and the gifts of the Holy Ghost. These, as well as the Lord's supper, are in connection with unity;\* the individual being responsible in each. It is the subject of spiritual manifestations which the apostle takes up in chapter 12. The first point was to establish the distinctive marks of the Spirit of God. There were evil spirits, who sought to creep in among the Christians, and to speak or act pretending to be the Spirit of God, and thus to confound everything. Christians of the present day hardly believe in such efforts of the enemy

as these. Spiritual manifestations are, no doubt, less striking now than at the time of which the apostle speaks; but the enemy adapts his means of deception to the circumstances in which man and the work of God are found. As Peter says in a similar case, “As there were false prophets among the people, so shall there be false teachers among you.” The enemy does not cease to act. “Forbidding to marry,” etc., was the doctrine of devils. In the last days his power will be manifested still more. God can restrain him by the energy of His Spirit, and by the power of the truth; but if he is not bridled, he still acts, deceiving men, and that by such things as one would suppose it impossible (if not deceived oneself) that a man of sober sense could believe. But it is surprising what a man can believe when he is left to himself, without being kept by God, when the power of the enemy is there. We talk of common sense, of reason (very precious they are); but history tells us that God alone gives them or preserves them to us.

[\* We have seen this with regard to the supper, in chapter 10:17. Here, chapter 12:13, we see it with regard to the Holy Ghost.]

Here the Spirit of God manifested Himself by the effects of His power, which broke forth in the midst of the assembly, attracting the attention even of the world. The enemy imitated them. The greater part of the Christians at Corinth having been poor Gentiles, without discernment, and stupidly led by the delusions of the enemy, they were the more in danger of being again deceived by this means. When a man is not filled with the Spirit of God, who gives force to the truth in his heart, and clearness to his moral vision, the seductive power of the enemy dazzles his imagination. He loves the marvelous, unbelieving as he may be with regard to the truth. He lacks holy discernment, because he is ignorant of the holiness and character of God, and has not the stability of a soul that possesses the knowledge of God (God Himself, we may say) as his treasure — of a soul which knows that it has all in Him, so that it needs no other marvels. If a man is not thus established by the knowledge of God, the power of the enemy strikes him — pre-occupies him; he cannot shake it off, he cannot account for it. He is a victim to the influence which this power exercises over his mind; the flesh is pleased with it, for in one shape or another the result is always liberty to the flesh.

Long led blindly by the power of evil spirits, the converted Gentiles were hardly in a state to discern and judge them. Strange to say, this demoniac power exercised such an influence that they forgot the importance even of the name of Jesus, or at least forgot that His name was not acknowledged by it. The enemy transforms himself into an angel of light, but he never really owns Jesus Christ as Lord. He will speak of Paul and Silvanus, and would have his part with Christians, but Christ is not acknowledged; and at last it is the breaking up and ruin of those who follow him. An unclean spirit would not say Lord Jesus, and the Spirit of God could not say Anathema to Jesus. But it is a question here of spirits, and not of conversion, nor of the necessity of grace working in the heart for the true confession of the name of Jesus — a very true thing, as we know, but not the subject here.

We come now to positive instructions. Nothing more important, more distinctive, more marvelous, than the presence of the Holy Ghost here below in the midst of Christians; the fruit to us, of the perfect work of Christ, but in itself the manifestation of the presence of God among men on the earth. The providence of God manifests His power in the works of creation, and His government which directs all things; but the Holy Ghost is His presence in this world, the testimony that He bears of Himself, of His character.\* He is among men to display Himself, not yet in glory, but in power and in testimony of what He is. Christ having accomplished redemption, and having presented the efficacy of His work to God, Sovereign and Judge, the assembly, being ransomed and cleansed by His blood, and united to Him as His body, became also the vessel of this power which acts in His members. Thus she ought to display this power in holiness — he is responsible to do so. But in this way, as to its exercise, man becomes in fact individually the vessel of this spiritual energy. It is a treasure committed to him. Now the Spirit is, in the first place, the link between the assembly and Christ, as well as between the Christian and Christ. It is by the Spirit that communion is realised and maintained, it is the primary function of the Spirit; and man must be in communion in order to realise the character and discern the will of God, and that, according to the testimony intended to be born by the Spirit come down to earth.

[\* It is a very striking truth that God's dwelling with men is the fruit of redemption. He did not dwell with Adam innocent; He could walk in the garden, but did not dwell there. He did not dwell with Abraham.]

But if the assembly does not maintain this communion, she loses her strength as the responsible witness of God on earth, and in fact her joy and her spiritual intelligence also. God is ever sovereign to act as He chooses, and Christ cannot fail in His faithfulness to His body; but the testimony committed to the assembly is no longer so rendered as to make it felt that God is present on the earth. The assembly is not, perhaps, aware of the estrangement, because she retains for a time much of that which God has given, which is far beyond all that was according to nature; and in losing strength she has also lost the discernment of what she ought to be. But God is never mistaken as to the assembly's condition — "Thou hast left thy first love." "Except thou repent," says He, "and do the first works, I will take away thy candlestick — "a solemn consideration for the assembly, as to her responsibility, when we reflect on the grace that has been shown her, on the fruits that have been — and those that ought to have been — manifested, and on the power given her to produce them.

The purposes of God for the assembly have their end and aim in heaven. They will be accomplished without the possibility of the least thing failing. All that is needful to bring her members there according to His counsels, Christ will do. They are redeemed by His blood to be His.

The ways of God are accomplished and unfolded on the earth for our instruction, both in the assembly and in individuals.

It is not only in His gifts that the presence of the Spirit of God is manifested. There are prophecies and miracles, men moved by the Holy Ghost, before the day of Pentecost. That which is attributed to faith in Hebrews 11 is often ascribed to the Spirit in the Old Testament. But the Spirit was promised in a special way in the Old Testament. He was never at that period the presence of God in the midst of the people, as He dwelt in the assembly. The glory came to take possession of the tabernacle or temple. His Spirit acted in sovereignty outside the order of His house, and could be with them when that glory was gone. But the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven to dwell in the disciples and in the assembly on earth, was the manifestation of the presence of God in His house, of God who was there by the Spirit. And this presence of the Spirit is so distinct, and



so plainly noted as a thing known and realised by the first Christians, which demonstrated instead of being demonstrated, that it is spoken of in the word as being the Holy Ghost Himself. In John 7 it is said, "The Holy Ghost was not yet." In Acts 19 the twelve men say to Paul, "We have not so much as heard whether the Holy Ghost is." It was not a question whether there was a Holy Ghost (every orthodox Jew believed it), but whether this presence of the Holy Ghost Himself dwelling here below, the new Comforter and Guide of the disciples, of which John the Baptist had spoken, had yet taken place. When come down, it was the presence of God in His spiritual temple on earth. The place in which the disciples were gathered together was shaken to show that God was there. Ananias and Sapphira fell down dead before the apostles for having lied to God. Philip is caught away by His power from the presence of the man who had received the knowledge of Jesus by his means.

Such was the presence of the Holy Ghost. In our chapter, the apostle speaks of the manifestations of His presence in the gifts which were exercised by the instrumentality of members of the body, whether for the calling out and edification of the assembly, or in testimony to those outside. Before entering on this subject, he gives the Corinthians — whom the enemy would have deeply deceived — that which would enable them to distinguish between the manifestation of the Holy Ghost and the actings of an evil spirit. He then speaks of gifts.

Now there were not divers spirits, as in the case of demons; there was only one and the same Spirit, but diversity of gifts. This gives occasion to bring in the different relationship (for he speaks of the order of the relations of man with God — the practical energy of which is in the Holy Ghost) in which men, moved by the Holy Ghost, are placed with regard to God and to Christ. The Spirit, one and the same Spirit, acts in them by various manifestations. But in the exercise of these different gifts they were administrators, and there was one Lord, that is, Christ. It was not therefore in them an independent and voluntary power: whatever might be the energy of the Spirit in them, they did not cease to be servants and stewards of Christ, and they were to act in this character, acknowledging in their service the Lordship of Christ. Nevertheless, although it was power in a man, and that it was man who acted, so that he was a servant (and a Man who was Head and who was served, although He was Son of God

and Lord of all), yet it was God who wrought, one and the same God who wrought all in all. It is not the Trinity, properly speaking, that is presented here in its own character, but one only Spirit acting in Christians, Jesus Lord, and God acting in the gifts.

The gifts are manifestations of the energy of the Spirit thus committed to men, under Christ who is Head and Lord; men were to use them as serving the Lord. Now Christ thought of what was profitable to His people, to those that were His; and the manifestation of the Spirit was given for the profit of souls, of the assembly in general. The apostle notices several of these gifts; but he reminds us again that it is the same Spirit who works in each case, distributing to every one according to His own will. Let the reader remark this passage. The apostle had said that God wrought all these things, and had spoken of the gifts as being manifestations of the Spirit. It might have been supposed that the Spirit was some vague influence, and that one must attribute everything to God without recognising a personal Spirit. But these operations, which were attributed to God in verse 6, are here attributed to the Spirit; and it is added, that He, the Spirit, distributes to each as He will. It is not therefore an inferior Spirit. Where He works, it is God who works; but these operations in men are gifts distributed according to the will of the Spirit, the Spirit being thus presented as acting personally in this distribution and according to His will.

Some of the gifts may require a short observation. Wisdom is the application of divine light to right and wrong, and to all the circumstances through which we pass — an expression which has a wide extent, because it applies to everything with regard to which we have to form a judgment. The Holy Ghost furnishes some in a peculiar way with this wisdom, with a wisdom according to God — a perception of the true nature of things, and of their relationship to each other, and of conduct with regard to both, which, coming from God, guides us through the difficulties of the way, and enables us to avoid that which would place us in a false position towards God and man.

Knowledge is intelligence in the mind of God as it is revealed to us. Faith is not here simple faith in the gospel; that is not a distinctive gift which one believer may possess and another not. This is evident. It is the faith, the

energy, given by God, which overcomes difficulties, which rises above dangers, which confronts them without being alarmed by them. The discerning of spirits is not that of a man's condition of soul — it has nothing to do with it. It is the knowing how to discern, by the mighty energy of the Spirit of God, the actings of evil spirits, and to bring them to light if necessary, in contrast with the action of the Spirit of God.

The other gifts require no comment. We must now return to the unity of the Spirit, with which is connected that which the apostle says after having spoken of the gifts. The Spirit was one, he had said, working diversely in the members according to His will. The importance of His personality, and the immense import of His divinity (if we reflect that it is He who works in and by man) is very evident when we observe that He is the center and the living power of the unity of the whole body, so that the individuals, in the exercise of their gifts, are but the members of the one and the same body divinely formed by the power and the presence of the Spirit. This point the apostle develops largely, in connection with the oneness of the body, the mutual dependence of the members, and the relationship of each one to the body as a whole.

The practical instructions are easily understood, but there are some important points in the general principles. The oneness of the body is produced by the baptism of the Holy Ghost, and the connection of the members depends upon it. By one Spirit we have all been baptised to be one body. The Lord's supper is the expression of this oneness; the Spirit is He who produces it, and who is its strength. The distinctive character of Jew and Gentile — and all other distinctions — was lost in the power of one Spirit common to all, who united them all as redeemed ones in one only body. The apostle in this verse (13) speaks of the baptism of the Holy Ghost; but the word suggests to him the supper, the second ordinance of the Lord, and he speaks of drinking into one spirit, alluding, I doubt not, to the Lord's supper. He does not speak of the Holy Ghost: one spirit was the state of the believers, the word being used in contrast with one body, associated in one heart and mind by the Spirit — participating in Christ.

It is not faith which is union, nor even life, though both are the portion of those united, but the Holy Ghost. The baptism of the Holy Ghost, then, is

that which forms Christians into one only body, and they are all made partakers of, are animated individually by, one and the same Spirit. Thus there are many members, but one only body, and a body composed of these members, which are dependent the one on the other, and have need of each other. And even those gifts which were the most shining were comparatively of the least value, even as a man clothes and ornaments the least honorable parts of his body, and leaves the more beautiful parts uncovered.

Another point which the apostle marks, is the common interest that exists among them in that they are members of the one and the same body. If one suffers, all suffer, since there is but one body animated by one Spirit. If one is honored, all rejoice. This also depends on the one self-same Spirit who unites and animates them. Moreover this body is the body of Christ. "Ye are," says the apostle, "the body of Christ, and members in particular."

Observe, also, here that, although that assembly at Corinth was only a part of the body of Christ, the apostle speaks of the whole body; for the assembly there was, according to the principle of its gathering, the body of Christ as assembled at Corinth. It is true that at the beginning he speaks of all those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus; but in fact he addresses the Corinthian assembly. And the general expression shows that, in the walk of the assembly, and in its general interests, a local assembly cannot be separated from the whole body of Christians on earth; and the language employed here shows that, as to their position before God, the Christians of one town were considered as representing the whole assembly, as far as regarded that locality; not as independent of the rest, but, on the contrary, as inseparably united to the others, living and acting, with respect to that locality as members of the body of Christ, and looked upon as such in it, because every Christian formed a part of that body, and they formed a part of it likewise. From the verses that follow we see that the apostle, while looking upon the Christians there as the body of Christ, the members of which they were, has in his mind the whole assembly as the assembly of God. In the New Testament there is no other membership than that of Christ, except that they are members of each other, as forming the entire body, but never members of a church; the idea is different. The word speaks of the members of a body, like that of man as a figure, never

of the members of an assembly in the modern sense of the word. We are members of Christ, and consequently of the body of Christ; so were the Corinthians, as far as that body was manifested at Corinth.

Moreover the body of Christ, the assembly, is looked at here as a whole upon the earth. God has set in the assembly, apostles, prophets, etc.; miracles, healings, tongues. It is very plain that this is on the earth, as were the Corinthians, and that it is the assembly as a whole. Healings and tongues were not in heaven, and the apostles were not those of an individual assembly. In a word it was the Holy Ghost, come down from heaven, who had formed the unity of the body on earth, and who acted in it by the especial gifts which distinguished the members.

The apostle then points out these gifts, not to give a formal and complete list of them, but to mark the order and importance of those he mentions. Tongues, of which the Corinthians were so proud, are the last gifts named in the list. Some gifts then, were more excellent than others; they were to be estimated according to the measure in which they served for the edification of the assembly. Those which served this end were to be desired.

It is interesting to remark here the difference of this chapter and Ephesians 4. Here it is simply power, and men are told in certain cases to be silent, when the power was there; it was the Holy Ghost working as power. In Ephesians 4 it is Christ's care as Head of the body. No gifts which are signs of power to others are mentioned; only what founds the assembly, edifies the saints, and builds the assembly up; and then there is promise of continuance till we all come. For Christ cannot cease to care for His body; but sign-gifts may disappear, and they have. Apostles and prophets were the foundation, and in that sense they were, when the foundation was laid, no longer in exercise.

Nevertheless there was something more excellent than all gifts. They were the manifestations of the power of God and of the mysteries of His wisdom; love, that of His nature itself.

They might speak with all tongues; they might have prophecy, the knowledge of mysteries, the faith which can remove mountains; they might give all their possessions to feed the poor, and their bodies to be tortured:

if they had not love, it was nothing. Love was conformity to the nature of God, the living expression of what He was, the manifestation of having been made partakers of His nature: it was the acting and feeling according to His likeness. This love is developed in reference to others; but others are not the motive, although they are the object. It has its source within; its strength is independent of the objects with which it is occupied. Thus it can act where circumstances might produce irritation or jealousy in the human heart. It acts according to its own nature in the circumstances; and by judging them according to that nature, they do not act upon the man who is full of love, except so far as they supply occasion for its activity, and direct its form. Love is its own motive. In us participation in the divine nature is its only source. Communion with God Himself alone sustains it through all the difficulties it has to surmount in its path. This love is the opposite of selfishness and of self-seeking, and shuts it out, seeking the good of others, even (as to its principle) as God has sought us in grace (see Ephesians 4:32; 5:1, 2). What a power to avoid evil in oneself, to forget all in order to do good!

It is worthy of note that the qualities of divine love are almost entirely of a passive character.

The first eight qualities pointed out by the Spirit are the expression of this renunciation of self. The three that follow, mark that joy in good which sets the heart free also from that readiness to suppose evil, which is so natural to human nature, on account of its own depth of evil, and that which it also experiences in the world. The last four show its positive energy, which — the source of every kind thought — by the powerful spring of its divine nature, presumes good when it does not see it, and bears with evil when it sees it, covering it by long — suffering and patience; not bringing it to light, but burying it in its own depth — a depth which is unfathomable, because love never changes. One finds nothing but love where it is real; for circumstances are but an occasion for it to act and show itself. Love is always itself, and it is love which is exercised and displayed. It is that which fills the mind: everything else is but a means of awakening the soul that dwells in love to its exercise. This is the divine character. No doubt the time of judgment will come; but our relationships with God are in grace. Love is His nature. It is now the time of its exercise. We represent Him on earth in testimony.

In that which is said of love in this chapter we find the reproduction of the divine nature, except that what is said is but the negative of the selfishness of the flesh in us. Now the divine nature changes not and never ceases; love therefore abides ever. Communications from God; the means by which they are made; knowledge, as attained here below, according to which we apprehend the truth in part only, although the whole truth is revealed to us (for we apprehend it in detail, so that we have never the whole at once, the character of our knowledge being to lay hold of different truths singly); all that is characterised by being in part — passes away. Love will not pass away. A child learns; he rejoices too in things that amuse him; when he becomes a man, he requires things in accordance with his intelligence as a man. It was thus with tongues and the edification of the assembly. The time however was coming when they should know even as they were known, not by communications of truths to a capacity that apprehended the truth in its different parts, but they should understand it as a whole in its unity.

Now love subsists already; there are faith and hope also. Not only shall these pass away, but even now, here below, that which is of the nature of God is more excellent than that which is connected with the capacity of human nature, even though enlightened by God, and having for its object the revealed glory of God.

Believers therefore were to follow after and seek for love, while desiring gifts, especially that they might prophesy, because thus they would edify the assembly, and that was the thing to aim at; it was that which love desired and sought, it was that which intelligence required, the two marks of a man in Christ, of one to whom Christ is all.

Two verses in this chapter 14 demand a little attention — the 3rd and the 6th. Verse 3 is the effect, or rather the quality, of that which a prophet says, and not a definition. He edifies, he encourages, he comforts, by speaking. Nevertheless these words show the character of what he said. Prophecy is in no wise simply the revelation of future events, although prophets as such have revealed them. A prophet is one who is so in communication with God as to be able to communicate His mind. A teacher instructs according to that which is already written, and so explains its import. But, in communicating the mind of God to souls under grace,

the prophet encouraged and edified them. With regard to verse 6, it is plain that coming with tongues (by the use of which the Corinthians like children, loved to shine in the assembly) he that so spoke, edified no one, for he was not understood. Perhaps he did not understand himself, but was the unintelligent instrument of the Spirit, whilst having the powerful impression of the fact that God spoke by his means, so that in the Spirit he felt that he was in communication with God, although his understanding was unfruitful. In any case no one could speak for the edification of the assembly unless he communicated the mind of God.

Of such communication the apostle distinguishes two kinds — revelation and knowledge. The latter supposes a revelation already given, of which some one availed himself by the Holy Ghost for the good of the flock. He then points out the gifts which were respectively the means of edifying in these two ways. It is not that the two latter terms (v. 6) are the equivalents of the two former; but the two things here spoken of as edifying the church were accomplished by means of these two gifts. There might be “prophecy” without its being absolutely a new revelation, although there was more in it than knowledge. It might contain an application of the thoughts of God, an address on the part of God to the soul, to the conscience, which would be more than knowledge, but which would not be a new revelation. God acts therein without revealing a new truth, or a new fact. “Knowledge,” or “doctrine,” teaches truths, or explains the word, a thing very useful to the assembly; but in it there is not the direct action of the Spirit in application, and thus not the direct manifestation of the presence of God to men in their own conscience and heart. When any one teaches, he who is spiritual profits by it; when one prophesies, even he who is not spiritual may feel it, he is reached and judged; and it is the same thing with the Christian’s conscience. Revelation, or knowledge, is a perfect division and embraces everything. Prophecy, and doctrine, are in intimate connection with the two; but prophecy embraces other ideas, so that this division does not exactly answer to the first two terms.

The apostle insists largely on the necessity for making oneself understood, whether one speaks, or sings, or prays. He desires — and the remark is of all importance in judging men’s pretensions to the Spirit — that the understanding be in exercise. He does not deny that they might speak with



tongues without the understanding being at all in it — a thing of evident power and utility when persons were present who understood no other language, or whose natural language it was. But, in general, it was an inferior thing when the Spirit did not act upon, and therefore by means of, the understanding in him who spoke. Communion between souls in a common subject, through the unity of the Spirit, did not exist when he who spoke did not understand what he said. The individual speaking did not himself enjoy, as from God, what he communicated to others. If others did not understand it either, it was child's play to utter words without meaning to the hearers. But the apostle desired to understand himself that which he said, although he spoke in many tongues; so that it was not jealousy on his part. He spoke more foreign tongues, by the gift of the Holy Ghost, than they all. But his soul loved the things of God — loved to receive truth intelligently from Him — loved to hold intelligent intercourse with others; and he would rather say five words with his understanding, than ten thousand without it in an unknown tongue.

What a marvelous power, what a manifestation of the presence of God — a thing worthy of the deepest attention — and, at the same time, what superiority to all carnal vanity, to the lustre reflected upon the individual by means of gifts — what moral power of the Spirit of God, where love saw nothing in these manifestations of power in gift but instruments to be used for the good of the assembly and of souls! It was the practical force of that love, to the exercise of which, as being superior to gifts, he exhorted the faithful. It was the love and the wisdom of God directing the exercise of His power for the good of those whom He loved. What a position for a man! What simplicity is imparted by the grace of God to one who forgets self in humility and love, and what power in that humility! The apostle confirms his argument by the effect that would be produced on strangers who might come into the assembly, or on unenlightened Christians, if they heard languages spoken which no one understood: they would think them mad. Prophecy, reaching their conscience, would make them feel that God was there — was present in the assembly of God.

Gifts were abundant in Corinth. Having regulated that which concerned moral questions, the apostle in the second place regulates the exercise of those gifts. Every one came with some manifestation of the power of the Holy Ghost, of which they evidently thought more than of conformity to

Christ. Nevertheless the apostle acknowledges in it the power of the Spirit of God, and gives rules for its exercise. Two or three might speak with tongues, provided there was an interpreter, so that the assembly might be edified. And this was to be done one at a time, for it appears they even spoke several at once. In the same way as to the prophets: two or three might speak, the others would judge if it really came from God. For, if it were given to them of God, all might prophesy; but only one at a time, that all might learn — a dependence always good for the most gifted prophets — and that all might be comforted. The spirits of the prophets (that is to say, the impulse of the power in the exercise of gifts) were subject to the guidance of the moral intelligence which the Spirit bestowed on the prophets. They were, on God's part, masters of themselves in the use of these gifts, in the exercise of this marvelous power which wrought in them. It was not a divine fury, as the pagans said of their diabolical inspiration, which carried them away; for God could not be the author of confusion in the assembly, but of peace. In a word we see that this power was committed to man in his moral responsibility; an important principle, which is invariable in the ways of God. God saved man by grace, when he had failed in his responsibility; but all that He has committed to man, whatever may be the divine energy of the gift, man holds as responsible to use it for the glory of God, and consequently for the good of others and especially for the assembly.

Women were to be silent in the assembly: it was not permitted to them to speak. They were to remain in obedience and not to direct others. The law moreover held the same language. It would be a shame to hear them speak in public. If they had had questions to ask, they might inquire of their husbands at home.

With all their gifts, the word did not come out from the Corinthians, nor had it come unto them only; they ought to submit to the universal order of the Spirit in the assembly. If they pretended to be led by the Spirit, let them acknowledge (and this would prove it,) that the things which the apostle wrote to them were the commandments of the Lord: a very important assertion; a responsible and serious position of this wonderful servant of God.

What a mixture of tenderness, of patience, and of authority! The apostle desires that the faithful should come to the truth and to order, conducted by their own affections; not fearing, if necessary for their good, to avail himself of an authority without appeal, as speaking directly from God — an authority which God would justify if the apostle was forced unwillingly to use it. If any were ignorant that he wrote by the Spirit with the authority of God, it was ignorance indeed; let such be given up to their ignorance. Spiritual and simple men would be delivered from such pretensions. Those who were really filled with the Spirit would acknowledge that what the apostle wrote came immediately from God, and was the expression of His wisdom, of that which became Him: for often there may be the recognition of divine or even human wisdom when it is found, where there was not the ability to find it, nor, if it were perceived in part, the power to set it forth with authority. Meanwhile the man of pretension, reduced to this place, would find the place profitable, and that which he needed.

We shall also observe here the importance of this assertion of the apostle's with regard to the inspiration of the epistles. That which he taught for the details even of the order of the assembly, was so really given of God, came so entirely from God, that they were the commandments of the Lord. For doctrine we have, at the end of the Epistle to the Romans, the same declaration that it was by means of prophetic writings that the gospel was disseminated among the nations.

The apostle resumes his instructions by saying, that they should desire to prophesy, not forbid to speak with tongues, and that all should be done with order and propriety.

But other evils had found means to introduce themselves into the midst of the shining gifts which were exercised in the bosom of the flock at Corinth. The resurrection of the dead was denied. Satan is wily in his dealings. Apparently it was only the body that was in question; nevertheless the whole gospel was at stake, for if the dead rose not, then Christ was not risen. And if Christ was not risen, the sins of the faithful were not put away, and the gospel was not true. The apostle therefore reserved this question for the end of his epistle, and he enters into it thoroughly.

First, he reminds them of that which he had preached among them as the gospel, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and was raised again according to the scriptures. This then was the means of their salvation, if they continued in it, unless they had believed in vain. Here at least was a very solid foundation for his argument: their salvation (unless all that they had believed was but a profitless fable) depended on the fact of the resurrection, and was bound up with it. But if the dead rose not, Christ was not risen, for He had died. The apostle begins therefore by establishing this fact through the most complete and positive testimonies, including his own testimony, since he had himself seen the Lord. Five hundred persons had seen Him at once, the greater part of whom were still alive to bear witness of it.

Observe, in passing, that the apostle can speak of nothing without a moral effect being produced in his heart, because he thinks of it with God. Thus, verses 8-10, he calls to mind the state of things with regard to himself and to the other apostles, and that which grace had done; and then, his heart unburdened, he returns to his subject. The testimony of every divine witness was the same. Everything declared that Christ was risen; everything depended on the fact that He was so. This was his starting-point. If, said he, that which was preached among you is that Christ was raised from the dead, how happens it that some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is none, Christ is not risen; if He is not risen, the preaching of His witnesses is vain, the faith of Christians vain. Nor that only; but these witnesses are false witnesses, for they had declared, with respect to God, that He had raised up Christ from the dead. But God had not raised Him up if the dead do not rise. And in that case their faith was vain: they were yet in their sins; and those who had already fallen asleep in Christ had perished. Now, if it be in this life only that the believer has hope in Christ, he is of all men the most miserable; he does but suffer as to this world. But it is not so, for Christ is risen.

Here, however, it is not only a general doctrine that the dead are raised. Christ, in rising, came up from among the dead. It is the favor and the power of God come in,\* to bring back from among the dead the One who had in His grace gone down into death to accomplish and to display the deliverance of man in Christ from the power of Satan and of death; and to

put a public seal on the work of redemption, to exhibit openly in man the victory over all the power of the enemy. Thus Christ arose from among all the other dead (for death could not hold Him), and established the glorious principle of this divine and complete deliverance, and He became the first-fruits of them that slept, who, having His life, await the exercise of His power, which will awaken them by virtue of the Spirit that dwells in them.

[\* Christ could say, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," for He who dwells in the temple is God. It is also said that He was raised up by the Spirit, and at the same time by the glory of the Father. But here He is viewed as man who has undergone death; and God intervenes, that He may not remain in it, because here the object is, not to show forth the glory of the Lord's Person, but to prove our resurrection, since He, a dead man, has been raised. By man came death; by man, resurrection. While demonstrating that He was the Lord from heaven, the apostle always speaks here of the Man Christ.]

This evidently gives a very peculiar character to the resurrection. It is not only that the dead rise, but that God, by His power, brings back certain persons from among the dead, on account of the favor which He has for them, and in connection with the life and the Spirit which are in them. Christ has a quite peculiar place. Life was in Him, and He is our life. He gained this victory by which we profit. He is of right the first-fruits. It was due to His glory. Had He not gained the victory, we should always have remained in prison. He had power Himself to resume life, but the great principle is the same, it is not only a resurrection of the dead, but those who are alive according to God arise as the objects of His favor, and by the exercise of that power which wills to have them for Himself and with Himself — Christ, the first-fruits: those who are Christ's, at His coming. We are associated with Christ in resurrection. We come out like Him, not only from death, but from the dead. We mark, too, here how Christ and His people are inseparably identified. If they do not rise, He is not risen. He was as really dead as we can be, has taken in grace our place under death, was a man as we are men (save sin) so truly that, if you deny this result for us, you deny the fact as to Him; and the object and foundation of faith itself fails. This identification of Christ with men, so as to be able to draw a conclusion from us to Him, is full of power and blessing. If the dead do not rise, He is not risen; He was as truly dead as we can be.

It needed to be by man. No doubt the power of God can call men back from the tomb. He will do so, acting in the Person of His Son, to whom all judgment is given. But that will not be a victory gained in human nature over death which held men captive. This it is which Christ has done. He was willing to be given up to death for us, in order (as man) to gain the victory for us over death and over him who had the power of death. By man came death; by man, resurrection. Glorious victory! complete triumph! We come out of the state where sin and its consequences fully reached us. Evil cannot enter the place into which we are brought out. We have crossed the frontiers for ever. Sin, the power of the enemy, remains outside this new creation, which is the fruit of the power of God after evil had come in, and which the responsibility of man shall not mar. It is God who maintains it in connection with Himself: it depends on Him.

There are two great principles established here: by man, death; by man, the resurrection of the dead; Adam and Christ as heads of two families. In Adam all die; in Christ all shall be made alive. But here there is an all-important development in connection with the position of Christ in the counsels of God. One side of this truth is the dependence of the family, so to call it, upon its head. Adam brought death into the midst of his descendants — those who are in relation with himself. This is the principle which characterises the history of the first Adam. Christ, in whom is life, brings life into the midst of those who are His — communicates it to them. This principle characterises the second Adam, and those who are His in Him. But it is life in the power of resurrection, without which it could not have been communicated to them. The grain of wheat would have been perfect in itself, but would have remained alone. But He died for their sins, and now He imparts life to them, all their sins being forgiven them.

Now, in the resurrection, there is an order according to the wisdom of God for the accomplishment of His counsels — Christ, the first-fruits; those who are Christ's, at His coming again. Thus those who are in Christ are quickened according to the power of the life which is in Christ; it is the resurrection of life. But this is not the whole extent of resurrection as acquired by Christ, in gaining the victory over death according to the Spirit of holiness. The Father has given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as the Father had given Him. The latter are those of whom this chapter treats essentially, because its subject is

resurrection among Christians; and the apostle, the Spirit Himself, loves to speak on the subject of the power of eternal life in Christ. Yet he cannot entirely omit the other part of the truth. The resurrection of the dead, he tells us, is come by man. But he is not here speaking of the communication of life in Christ. In connection with this last and nearer part of his subject, he does not touch upon the resurrection of the wicked; but after the coming of Christ he introduces the end, when He shall have given up the kingdom to the Father. With the kingdom is introduced the power of Christ exercised over all things — a different thought entirely from the communication of life to His own.

There are three steps therefore in these events: first, the resurrection of Christ; then, the resurrection of those who are His, at His coming; afterwards, the end, when He shall have given up the kingdom to the Father. The first and the second are the accomplishment in resurrection of the power of life in Christ and in His people. When He comes, He takes the kingdom; He takes His great power and acts as king. From His coming then to the end is the development of His power, in order to subdue all things to Himself; during which all power and all authority shall be abolished. For He must reign till all His enemies are under His feet; the last subdued will be death. Here then, as the effect of His power only, and not in connection with the communication of life, we find the resurrection of those who are not His; for the destruction of death is their resurrection. They are passed over in silence: only that death, such as we see it, has no longer dominion over them. Christ has the right and the power, in virtue of His resurrection and of His having glorified the Father, to destroy the dominion of death over them, and to raise them up again. This will be the resurrection of judgment. Its effect is declared elsewhere.

When He has put all His enemies under His feet, and has given back the kingdom to His Father (for it is never taken from Him, nor given to another, as happens with human kingdoms), then the Son Himself is subject to Him who has put all things under Him, in order that God may be all in all. The reader should observe, that it is the counsels of God with regard to the government of all things which is here spoken of, and not His nature; and moreover it is the Son, as man, of whom these things are said. This is not an arbitrary explanation: the passage is from Psalm 8, the subject of which is the exaltation of man to the position of head of all

things, God putting all things under His feet. Nothing, says the apostle, is excepted (Hebrews 2:8) save, as he adds here, that He is necessarily excepted who put all things under Him. When the man Christ, the Son of God, has in fact accomplished this subjugation, He gives back to God the universal power which had been committed to Him, and the mediatorial kingdom, which He held as man, ceases. He is again subject, as He was on earth. He does not cease to be one with the Father, even as He was so while living in humiliation on the earth, although saying at the same time “Before Abraham was, I am.” But the mediatorial government of man has disappeared — is absorbed in the supremacy of God, to which there is no longer any opposition. Christ will take His eternal place, a Man, the Head of the whole redeemed family, being at the same time God blessed for ever, one with the Father. In Psalm 2 we see the Son of God, as born on earth, King in Zion, rejected when He presented Himself on earth; in Psalm 8 the result of His rejection, exalted as Son of man at the head of all that the hand of God has made. Then we find Him here laying down this conferred authority, and resuming the normal position of humanity, namely, that of subjection to Him who has put all things under Him; but through it all, never changing His divine nature, nor — save so far as exchanging humiliation for glory — His human nature either. But God is now all in all, and the special government of man in the Person of Jesus — a government with which the assembly is associated (see Ephesians 1:20-23, which is a quotation from the same Psalm) is merged in the immutable supremacy of God, the final and normal relationship of God with His creature. We shall find the Lamb omitted in that which is said in Revelation 21:1-8, speaking of this same period.

Thus we find in this passage resurrection by man — death having entered by man; the relationship of the saints with Jesus, the source and the power of life, the consequence being His resurrection, and theirs at His coming; power over all things committed to Christ, the risen Man; afterwards the kingdom given back to God the Father, the tabernacle of God with men, and the man Christ, the second Adam, eternally a man subject to the Supreme — this last a truth of infinite value to us (the resurrection of the wicked, though supposed in the resurrection brought in by Christ, not being the direct subject of the chapter). The reader must now remark that this passage is a revelation, in which the Spirit of God, having fixed the



apostle's thoughts upon Jesus and the resurrection, suddenly interrupts the line of his argument, announcing — with that impulse which the thought of Christ always gave to the mind and heart of the apostle — all the ways of God in Christ with regard to the resurrection, to the connection of those that are His with Him in that resurrection, and the government and dominion which belong to Him as risen, as well as the eternal nature of His relationship, as man, to God. Having communicated these thoughts of God, which were revealed to him, he resumes the thread of his argument in verse 29. This part ends with verse 34, after which he treats the question, which they had brought forward as a difficulty — in what manner should the dead be raised?

By taking the verses 20-28 (which contain so important a revelation in a passage that is complete in itself) as a parenthesis, the verses 29-34 become much more intelligible, and some expressions, which have greatly harassed interpreters, have a tolerably determined sense. The apostle had said, in verse 16, "If the dead rise not," and then, that if such were the case, those who had fallen asleep in Jesus had perished, and that the living were of all men most miserable. At verse 28 he returns to these points, and speaks of those who are baptised for the dead, in connection with the assertion, that if there were no resurrection those who had fallen asleep in Christ had perished; "if," he says, repeating more forcibly the expression in verse 16, "the dead rise not at all"; and then shows how entirely he is himself in the second case he had spoken of, "of all men most miserable," and almost in the case of perishing also, being every moment in danger, striving as with wild beasts, dying daily. Baptised, then, for the dead is to become a Christian with the view fixed on those who have fallen asleep in Christ, and particularly as being slain for Him, taking one's portion with the dead, yea, with the dead Christ; it is the very meaning of baptism (Romans 6). How senseless if they do not rise! As in 1 Thessalonians 4, the subject, while speaking of all Christians, is looked at in the same way. The word translated "for" is frequently used in these epistles for "in view of," "with reference to."

We have seen that verses 20-28 form a parenthesis. Verse 29 then is connected with verse 18. Verses 30-32 relate to verse 19. The historical explanations of these last verses is found in the second epistle (see chap. 1:8, 9; 4:8-12). I do not think that verse 32 should be taken literally. The

word translated “I have fought with beasts” is usually employed in a figurative sense, to be in conflict with fierce and implacable enemies. In consequence of the violence of the Ephesians he had nearly lost his life, and even despaired of saving it; but God had delivered him. But to what purpose all these sufferings, if the dead rise not? And observe here, that although the resurrection proves that death does not touch the soul (compare Luke 20:38), yet the apostle does not think of immortality,\* apart from resurrection. God has to do so, with man? and man is composed of body and of soul. He gives account in the judgment of the things done in the body. It is when raised from the dead that he will do so. The intimate union between the two, quite distinct as they are, forms the spring of life, the seat of responsibility, the means of God’s government with regard to His creatures, and the sphere in which His dealings are displayed. Death dissolves this union; and although the soul survives, and is happy or miserable, the existence of the complete man is suspended, the judgment of God is not applied, the believer is not yet clothed with glory. Thus to deny the resurrection, was to deny the true relationship of God with man, and to make death the end of man, destroying man as God contemplates him, and making him perish like a beast. Compare the Lord’s argument in that passage in Luke of which I have already quoted one verse.

[\* But, remark, mortality in the New Testament is never applied to anything but the body, and that exclusively and emphatically, “this mortal” and the like. The separate existence of the soul, as not dying with the body, is taught plainly enough in scripture, and not merely for the Christian (as to whom it is evident, for we are with Christ) but for all, as in Luke 20:38; 12:4, 5, and the end of chapter 16.]

Alas! the denial of the resurrection was linked with the desire to unbridle the senses. Satan introduced it into the heart of Christians through their communication with persons with whom the Spirit of Christ would have had no communion.

They needed to have their conscience exercised, to be awakened, in order that righteousness might have its place there. It is the lack of that which is commonly the true source of heresies. They failed in the knowledge of God. It was to the shame of these Christians. God grant us to take heed to it! It is the great matter even in questions of doctrine.

But further, the inquisitive spirit of man would fain be satisfied with respect to the physical mode of the resurrection. The apostle did not gratify it, while rebuking the stupid folly of those who had occasion every day to see analogous things in the creation that surrounded them. Fruit of the power of God, the raised body would be, according to the good pleasure of Him who gave it anew for the glorious abode of the soul, a body of honor, which, having passed through death, would assume that glorious condition which God had prepared for it — a body suited to the creature that possessed it, but according to the supreme will of Him who clothed the creature with it. There were different kinds of bodies; and as wheat was not the bare grain that had been sown, although a plant of its nature and not another, so should it be with the raised man. Different also were the glories of heavenly and earthly bodies: star differed from star in glory. I do not think that this passage refers to degrees of glory in heaven, but to the fact that God distributes glory as He pleases. Heavenly glory and earthly glory are however plainly put in contrast, for there will be an earthly glory.

And observe here, that it is not merely the fact of the resurrection which is set forth in this passage, but also its character. For the saints it will be a resurrection to heavenly glory. Their portion will be bodies incorruptible, glorious, vessels of power, spiritual. This body, sown as the grain of wheat for corruption, shall put on glory and incorruptibility.\* It is only the saints that are here spoken of — "they also that are heavenly," and in connection with Christ, the second Adam. The apostle had said that the first body was "natural." Its life was that of the living soul; as to the body it partook of that kind of life which the other animals possessed — whatever might be its superiority as to its relationship with God, in that God Himself had breathed into his nostrils the spirit of life, so that man was thus in a special way in relationship with God (of His race, as the apostle said at Athens). "Adam, the son of God," said the Holy Ghost in Luke — made in the image of God. His conduct should have answered to it, and God had revealed Himself to him in order to place him morally in the position that was suitable to this breath of life which he had received. He had become — free as he was from death by the power of God who sustained him, or mortal by the sentence of Him who had formed him — a

living soul. There was not the quickening power in himself. The first Adam was simply a man — "the first man Adam."

[\* It is a striking collateral proof of the completeness of our redemption, and the impossibility of our coming into judgment, that we are raised in glory. We are glorified before we arrive before the judgment seat. Christ will have come and changed our vile body and fashioned it like His glorious body.]

The word of God does not express itself thus with regard to Christ, when speaking of Him in this passage as the last Adam. He could not be the last Adam without being a man; but it does not say "the last man was a quickening Spirit," but the "last Adam"; and when it speaks of Him as the second Man, adds that He was "from heaven." Christ had not only life as a living soul, He had the power of life, which could impart life to others. Although He was a man on earth, He had life in Himself; accordingly He quickened whom He would. Nevertheless it is as the last Adam, the second Man, the Christ, that the word here speaks of Him. It is not only that God quickens whom He will, but the last Adam, Christ, the Head, spiritually, of the new race, has this power in Himself: and therefore it is said — for it is always Jesus on earth who is in question — "He hath given to the Son to have life in himself." Of us it is said, "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son: he who hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." Howbeit that which is of the Spirit is not that which was first, but that which is natural, that is, that which has the natural life of the soul. That which is spiritual, which has its life from the power of the Spirit, comes after. The first man is of the earth — has his origin, such as he is (God having breathed into his nostrils a spirit or breath of life), from the earth. Therefore he is of the dust, even as God said, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." The last Adam, though He was as truly man as the first, is from heaven.

As belonging to the first Adam, we inherit his condition, we are as he is: as participating in the life of the second, we have part in the glory which He possesses as Man, we are as He is, we exist according to His mode of being, His life being ours. Now the consequence here is that, as we have born the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Observe here, that the first Adam and the last, or second Man, respectively, are looked at as in that condition into which they entered when their respective trials under responsibility had ended; and those who

are connected with the one and the other inherit the condition and the consequences of the work of the one and the other, as thus tested. It is the fallen Adam who is the father of a race born after his image — a fallen and guilty race, sinful and mortal. He had failed, and committed sin, and lost his position before God, was far from Him, when he became the father of the human race. If the corn of wheat falling into the ground does not die, it bears no fruit; if it die, it bears much fruit. Christ had glorified God, made expiation for sin, and was raised in righteousness; had overcome death and destroyed the power of Satan, before He became, as a quickening Spirit, the Head of a spiritual race,\* to whom — united to Himself — He communicates all the privileges that belong to the position before God which He has acquired, according to the power of that life by which He quickens them. It is a risen and glorified Christ whose image we shall bear, as we now bear the image of a fallen Adam.

[\* It is not that as Son of God He could not quicken at all times, as indeed He did. But in order to our partaking with Him, all this was needed and accomplished, and here He is looked at as Himself risen from the dead, the heavenly Man. Thus also it is founded in divine righteousness.]

Flesh and blood, not merely sin, cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Corruption (for such we are) cannot inherit that which is incorruptible. This leads the apostle to a positive revelation of that which will take place with regard to the enjoyment of incorruptibility by all the saints. Death is conquered. It is not necessary that death should come upon all, still less that all should undergo actual corruption; but it is not possible for flesh and blood to inherit the kingdom of glory. But we shall not all sleep; there are some who will be changed without dying. The dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we (for redemption being accomplished and Christ ready to judge the quick and the dead, the apostle always looked at it as a thing immediately before his eyes, ready to take place any moment) shall be changed (a change equivalent to resurrection); for that which is corruptible, if not already in dust and corruption, shall put on incorruptibility; that which is mortal, immortality. We see that this relates to the body; it is in his body that man is mortal, even when he has eternal life, and shall live by Christ and with Christ. The power of God will form the saints whether living or dead for the inheritance of glory.

Take especial notice of what has just been said. Death is entirely conquered — annulled in its power — for the Christian. He possesses a life (Christ risen), which sets him above death, not perhaps physically, but morally. It has lost all its power over his soul, as the fruit of sin and judgment. It is so entirely conquered, that there are some who will not die at all. All Christians have Christ for their life. If He is absent, and if He does not return — as will be the case as long as He sits on His Father's throne, and our life is hid with Him in God — we undergo death physically according to the sentence of God; that is to say, the soul is separated from the mortal body. When He shall return and exercise His power, having risen up from the Father's throne to take His people to Himself before He exercises judgment, death has no power at all over them: they do not pass through it. That the others are raised from the dead is a proof of power altogether divine, and more glorious even than that which created man from the dust. That the living are changed proves a perfection of accomplished redemption, and a power of life in Christ which had left no trace, no remains, of the judgment of God as to them, nor of the power of the enemy, nor of the thralldom of man to the consequences of his sin. In place of all that, is an exercise of divine power, which manifests itself in the absolute, complete, and eternal deliverance of the poor guilty creature who before was under it — a deliverance that has its perfect manifestation in the glory of Christ, for He had subjected Himself in grace to the condition of man under death for sin; so that to faith it is always certain, and accomplished in His Person. But the resurrection of the dead and the change of the living will be its actual accomplishment for all who are His, at His coming. What a glorious deliverance is that which is wrought by the resurrection of Christ, who — sin entirely blotted out, righteousness divinely glorified and made good, Satan's power destroyed — transports us by virtue of an eternal redemption, and by the power of a life which has abolished death, into an entirely new sphere, where evil cannot come, nor any of its consequences, and where the favor of God in glory shines upon us perfectly and for ever! It is that which Christ has won for us according to the eternal love of God our Father, who gave Him to us to be our Savior.

At an unexpected moment we shall enter into this scene, ordained by the Father, prepared by Jesus. The power of God will accomplish this change in an instant: the dead shall rise, we shall be changed. The last trumpet is

but a military allusion, as it appears to me, when the whole troop wait for the last signal to set out all together.

In the quotation from Isaiah 25:8 we have a remarkable application of scripture. Here it is only the fact that death is thus swallowed up in victory, for which the passage is quoted; but the comparison with Isaiah shows us that it will be, not at the end of the world, but at a period when, by the establishment of the kingdom of God in Zion, the veil, under which the heathen have dwelt in ignorance and darkness, shall be taken off their face. The whole earth shall be enlightened, I do not say at the moment, but at the period. But this certainty of the destruction of death procures us a present confidence, although death still exists. Death has lost its sting, the grave its victory. All is changed by the grace which, at the end, will bring in this triumph. But meantime, by revealing to us the favor of God who bestows it, and the accomplishment of the redemption which is its basis, it has completely changed the character of death. Death, to the believer who must pass through it, is only leaving that which is mortal; it no longer bears the terror of God's judgment, nor that of the power of Satan. Christ has gone into it and born it and taken it away totally and for ever. Nor that only, He has taken its source away. It was sin which sharpened and envenomed that sting. It was the law which, presenting to the conscience exact righteousness, and the judgment of God which required the accomplishment of that law, and pronounced a curse on those who failed in it, it was the law which gave sin its force to the conscience, and made death doubly formidable. But Christ was made sin, and bore the curse of the law, being made a curse for His own who were under the law; and thus, while glorifying God perfectly with regard to sin, and to the law in its most absolute requirements, He has completely delivered us from the one and the other, and, at the same time, from the power of death, out of which He came victorious. All that death can do to us is to take us out of the scene in which it exercises its power, to bring us into that in which it has none. God, the Author of these counsels of grace, in whom is the power that accomplishes them, has given us this deliverance by Jesus Christ our Lord. Instead of fearing death, we render thanks to Him who has given us the victory by Jesus. The great result is to be with Jesus and like Jesus, and to see Him as He is. Meanwhile we labor in the scene where death exercises its power — where Satan uses it, if God allows him, to stop us in

our way. We labor although there are difficulties, with entire confidence, knowing what will be the infallible result. The path may be beset by the enemy; the end will be the fruit of the counsels and the power of our God, exercised on our behalf according to that which we have seen in Jesus, who is the Head and the manifestation of the glory which His own shall enjoy.

To sum up what has been said, we see the two things in Christ: firstly, power over all things, death included; He raises up even the wicked: and secondly, the association of His own with Himself. With reference therefore to the latter, the apostle directs our eyes to the resurrection of Christ Himself. He not only raises up others, but He has been raised up Himself from the dead. He is the first-fruits of them that sleep. But before His resurrection He died for our sins. All that separated us from God is entirely put away — death, the wrath of God, the power of Satan, sin, disappear, as far as we are concerned, in virtue of the work of Christ; and He is made to us that righteousness which is our title to heavenly glory. Nothing remains of that which appertained to His former human estate, except the everlasting favor of God who brought Him there. Thus it is a resurrection from among the dead by the power of God in virtue of that favor, because He was the delight of God, and in His exaltation His righteousness is accomplished.

For us it is a resurrection founded on redemption, and which we enjoy even now in the power of a life, which brings the effect and the strength of both into our hearts, enlightened by the Holy Ghost who is given to us. At the coming of Christ the accomplishment will take place in fact for our bodies.

With regard to practice, the assembly at Corinth was in a very poor condition; and being asleep as to righteousness, the enemy sought to lead them astray as to faith also. Nevertheless, as a body, they kept the foundation; and as to external spiritual power, it shone very brightly.

The apostle, in his letter, had treated of the disorder that reigned among these believers, and his spirit was to a certain degree relieved by fulfilling this duty towards them; for, after all, they were Christians and an assembly of God. In the last chapter he speaks to them in the sense of this, although he could not make up his mind to go to Corinth, for he had intended to visit them in going to Macedonia, and a second time in



returning thence. He does not say here why he did not go thither on his way to Macedonia, and he speaks with uncertainty as to his sojourn at Corinth when he should arrive there on his return from Macedonia; if the Lord permitted, he would tarry awhile with them. The second epistle will explain all this. In their existing state his heart would not allow him to visit them. But he treats them tenderly, nevertheless, as still beloved Christians, giving them directions suited to the circumstances of the moment. They were to make a collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem, as had been arranged with the apostles when Paul left Jerusalem as the recognised apostle of the Gentiles. This was not to be done in haste when he came, but by laying up every week in proportion to their prosperity. He would send persons chosen by the Corinthians, or take them with him if he went himself to Jerusalem. He thought of remaining till Pentecost at Ephesus, where a great door was opened to him and there were many adversaries. If these two things go together, it is a motive for remaining; the open door is an inducement on the part of God, the activity of adversaries makes it necessary with regard to the enemy. A closed door is a different thing from opposition. People do not hearken if the door is shut; God does not act to draw attention. If God is acting, the assiduity of the enemy is but a reason for not abandoning the work. It appears (chap. 15:32) that Paul had already suffered much at Ephesus, but he still continued his work there. He could not pour out his heart on the subject to the Corinthians, seeing the state they were in. He does it in the second Epistle, when the first had produced the effect he desired. There was a tumult afterwards at Ephesus, stirred up by the craftsmen, in consequence of which Paul left the city (Acts 19). Verses 21, 22, of this chapter in Acts show us the period at which he wrote this letter. The danger to his life had preceded it, but he remained at Ephesus after that. The tumult closed the door and sent him away.

In Acts 19:22 we see that he had sent Timothy into Macedonia. In our epistle he supposes that he might go on as far as Corinth. If he came, the Corinthians were to receive him as they would have received Paul. He had begged Apollos to go to them; he had already been made a blessing to them; and Paul thought he might be so again. He did not fear that Apollos would displace him in the heart of the Corinthians. But Apollos shared the apostle's feeling; he was not inclined to recognise, or by his presence to

have the appearance of upholding, that which prevented Paul going thither; and the more so because there were some in the assembly at Corinth who wished to use his name as the standard of a party. Free in his movements, he would act according to the judgment which the Lord would enable him to form.

After speaking of Apollos, the apostle's mind turns again to his children in the faith, dear to him, whatever their faults might be. Verses 13, 14, are the effusion of a heart which forgot these faults in the ardent desire of a charity that only thought of their blessing according to the Spirit. Three Corinthians had brought him supplies; it does not appear to have been on the part of the assembly, nor that it was any testimony of its love which had refreshed the apostle's heart. He would have the Corinthians to rejoice at it. He does not doubt that they loved him enough to be refreshed because it was so. Their charity had not thought of it beforehand; but he expresses his conviction that they took pleasure in the thought of his heart being refreshed. It is touching to see here, that the apostle's charity suggests that which grace would produce on the heart of the Corinthians, communicating that which they probably would not otherwise have known of — the active charity of three brethren of the assembly; and, in love uniting them to his joy, if they had not been united to that which occasioned it. The flame of charity communicates itself by rising above coldness, and reaching the depths of divine life in the heart; and, once communicated, the soul, before unkindled, glows now with the same fire.

We find in this chapter four channels, so to speak, of ministry. Firstly, the apostle, sent direct from the Lord and by the Holy Ghost. Secondly, persons associated with the apostle in his work, and acting at his desire, and (in the case of Timothy) one pointed out by prophecy. Thirdly, an entirely independent laborer, partly instructed by others (see Acts 18:26), but acting where he saw fit, according to the Lord and to the gift he had received. Fourthly, one who gives himself to the service of the saints, as well as others who helped the apostle and labored. Paul exhorts the faithful to submit themselves to such, and to all those who helped in the work and labored. He would also have them acknowledge those who refreshed his heart by their service of devotedness. Thus we find the simple and important principle according to which all the best affections of the heart are developed, namely, the acknowledgment of every one according to the

manifestation of grace and of the power of the Holy Ghost in him. The christian man submits to those who addict themselves to the service of the saints; he acknowledges those who manifest grace in a special way. They are not persons officially nominated and consecrated who are spoken of here. It is the conscience and the spiritual affection of Christians which acknowledges them according to their work — a principle valid at all times, which does not permit this respect to be demanded, but which requires it to be paid.

We may remark, here, that this epistle, although entering into all the details of the interior conduct of an assembly, does not speak of elders or of any formally established officers at all. It is certain, that in general there were such; but God has provided in the word for the walk of an assembly at all times, and, as we see, principles which oblige us to acknowledge those who serve in it through personal devotedness without being officially appointed. General unfaithfulness, or the absence of such established officers, will not prevent those who obey the word from following it in all that is needful for christian order. We see moreover that, whatever might be the disorder, the apostle recognises the members of the assembly as being all real Christians; he desires them to acknowledge one another by the kiss of love, the universal expression of brotherly affection. This is so entirely the case that he pronounces a solemn anathema on every one who loved not the Lord Jesus. There might be such, but he would in no way recognise them. If there were any, let them be anathema. Is this an allowed mixture? He will not believe it, and he embraces them all in the bonds of christian love (v. 24).

The last point is important. The state of the assembly at Corinth might give room for some uncertainty as to the Christianity of certain members, or persons in connection with them although not dwelling at Corinth. He admonishes them; but in fact, in cases of the most grievous sin where the discipline of God was exercised, or that of man was required, the guilty are looked upon as Christians. (See chap. 10 for the warning; chap. 11:32 for the Lord's discipline; for that of man, chap. 5:5 in this epistle; for the principle, 2 Corinthians 2:8). Besides, he denounces with an anathema those who do not love the Lord Jesus. Discipline is exercised towards the wicked man who is called a brother. He who calls himself a Christian, yet

does not really love the Lord — for there may be such — is the subject of the most terrible anathema.

It is sweet to see that, after faithfully (although with anguish of heart) correcting every abuse, the spirit of the apostle returns by grace into the enjoyments of charity in his relationship with the Corinthians. The terrible verse 22 was not felt to be inconsistent with the love that dictated the other verses. It was the same spirit, for Christ was the sole spring of his charity.

We may notice (v. 21) that the apostle, as other passages testify, employed some one to write for him. The Epistle to the Galatians is an exception. He verified his epistles to the assemblies by writing the salutation at the end with his own hand, marking the importance he attached to the exactitude of the verbal contents, and confirming the principle of an exact inspiration. His heart flows out (v. 24), and he comforts himself in being able to acknowledge them all in love.

## 2 CORINTHIANS

The apostle writes the second Epistle to the Corinthians under the influence of the consolations of Christ — consolations experienced when the troubles which came upon him in Asia were at their height; and renewed at the moment when he wrote his letter, by the good news which Titus had brought him from Corinth — consolations which (now that he is happy about them) he imparts to the Corinthians; who, by grace, had been their source in the last instance.

The first letter had awakened their conscience, and had re-established the fear of God in their heart, and integrity in their walk. The sorrowing heart of the apostle was revived by hearing this good news. The state of the Corinthians had cast him down and a little removed from his heart the feelings produced by the consolations with which Jesus filled it during his trials at Ephesus. How various and complicated are the exercises of him who serves Christ and cares for souls! The spiritual restoration of the Corinthians, by dissipating Paul's anguish, had renewed the joy of these consolations, which the tidings of their misconduct had interrupted. He afterwards returns to this subject of his sufferings at Ephesus; and develops, in a remarkable way, the power of the life by which he lived in Christ.

He addresses all the saints of that country, as well as those in the city of Corinth, which was its capital; and, being led by the Holy Ghost to write according to the real sentiments which that Spirit produced in him, he at once places himself in the midst of the consolations which flowed into his heart, in order to acknowledge in them the God who poured them into his tried and exercised spirit.

Nothing more touching than the work of the Spirit in the apostle's heart. The mixture of gratitude and worship towards God, of joy in the consolations of Christ, and of affection for those on whose account he now rejoiced, has a beauty entirely inimitable by the mind of man. Its simplicity and its truth do but enhance the excellence and exalted character of this divine work in a human heart. "Blessed be God, even the Father of

our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; or whether we be comforted it is for your consolation and salvation.” Blessing God for the consolations which he had received, content to suffer, because his participation in suffering encouraged the faith of the Corinthians who suffered, by showing them the path ordained of God for the most excellent, he pours into their hearts the consolation of his own, as soon as comfort comes to him from God. His first thought (and it is always so with one who realizes his dependence on God, and who abides in his presence — see Genesis 24) is to bless God, and to acknowledge Him as the source of all consolation. The Christ, whom he has found both in the sufferings and in the consolation, turns his heart immediately to the beloved members of His body.

Mark at once the perversity of man’s heart and the patience of God. In the midst of sufferings for the sake of Christ, they could take part in the sin that dishonored His name — a sin unknown among the Gentiles. In spite of this sin God would not deprive them of the testimony, which those sufferings gave them, of the truth of their Christianity — sufferings which assured the apostle that the Corinthians would enjoy the consolations of Christ, which accompanied sufferings for His sake. It is beautiful to see how grace lays hold of the good, in order to conclude that the evil will surely be corrected, instead of discrediting the good because of the evil. Paul was near Christ — the source of strength.

He continues by presenting, experimentally, the doctrine of the power of life in Christ,\* which had its development and its strength in death to all that is temporal, to all that links us with the old creation, to mortal life itself. He then touches upon almost every subject that had occupied him in the first epistle, but with an unburdened heart, although with a firmness that desired their good, and the glory of God, let it cost himself what sorrow it might.

[\* The beginning of this Epistle presents the experimental power of that which is doctrinally taught in Romans 5:12 to chap. 8, and is extremely instructive

in this respect. It is not so much Colossians and Ephesians; the practical fruit of the doctrine there is the display of God's own character. However we have in a measure what is taught in Colossians carried out.]

Observe here the admirable connection between the personal circumstances of God's laborers, and the work to which they are called, and even the circumstances of that work. The first epistle had produced that salutary effect on the Corinthians to which the apostle, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, had destined it. Their conscience had been awakened, and they had become zealous against the evil in proportion to the depth of their fall. This is always the effect of the work of the Spirit, when the conscience of the Christian who has fallen is really touched. The apostle's heart can open with joy to their complete and sincere obedience. Meanwhile he had himself passed through terrible trials, so that he had despaired of life; and he had been able through grace to realise the power of that life in Christ which gained the victory over death, and could pour abundantly into the hearts of the Corinthians the consolations of that life, which were to raise them up again. There is a God who conducts all things in the service of His saints — the sorrow through which they pass, as all the rest.

Observe, also, that he does not need to begin by reminding the Corinthians, as he had done in the first epistle, of their calling and their privileges as sanctified in Christ. He breaks out in thanksgiving to the God of all consolation. Holiness is brought forward when it is practically wanting among the saints. If they are walking in holiness, they enjoy God, and they speak of Him. The way in which the various parts of the work of God are linked together, in and by means of the apostle, is seen in the expressions that flow from his grateful heart. God comforts him in his sufferings; and the consolation is such that it is suited to comfort others, in whatsoever affliction it may be; for it is God Himself who is the consolation, by pouring into the heart His love and His communion, as it is enjoyed in Christ.

If afflicted, it was for the comfort of others by the sight of similar afflictions in those who were honored of God, and the consciousness of unison in the same blessed cause, and relationship with God (the heart being touched and brought back to these affections by this means). If comforted, it was to comfort others with the consolations that he himself enjoyed in affliction. And the afflictions of the Corinthians were a

testimony to him that, however great their moral weakness had been, they had part in those consolations which he enjoyed himself, and which he knew to be so deep, so real, which he knew to be of God, and a token of His favor. Precious bonds of grace! And how true it is in our little measure, that the sufferings of those who labor re-animate on the one hand love towards them, and on the other re-assure the laborer as to the sincerity of the objects of his christian affection, by presenting them anew to him in the love of Christ. The affliction of the apostle had helped him in writing to the Corinthians with the grief that was suitable to their condition; but what faith was that which occupied itself with such energy and such entire forgetfulness of self about the sad state of others, amid such circumstances as then surrounded the apostle! His strength was in Christ.

His heart expands towards the Corinthians. We see that his affections flow freely — a thing of great value. He reckons on the interest they will take in the account of his sufferings; he is sure that they will rejoice in what God has given him, even as he rejoices in them as the fruit of his labors, and that they will acknowledge what he is; and he is content to be a debtor to their prayers with regard to the gifts displayed in himself, so that his success in the gospel was to them as a personal interest of their own. He could truly demand their prayers, for his course had been run in unmingled sincerity, and especially among them. This leads him to explain to them the motives of his movements, of which he had not spoken to them before, referring these movements to his own plans and motives, subject to the Lord. He is always master (under Christ) of his movements; but he can now speak freely of that which had decided him, which the Corinthians were not before in a state to know. He wishes to satisfy them, to explain things to them, so as to demonstrate his perfect love for them; and, at the same time, to maintain his entire liberty in Christ, and not make himself responsible to them for what he did. He was their servant in affliction, but free to be so, because he was amenable only to Christ, although he satisfied their conscience (because he served Christ) if their conscience was upright.

His own conscience however was clear; and he only wrote to them that which they knew and acknowledged, and, as he trusted, would acknowledge to the end; so that they should rejoice in him, as he in them.



But had there been any lightness in his decisions, since, as he now informed them, he had intended to visit them on his way to Macedonia (where he was at the moment of writing this letter), and then a second time on his return from that country? In no wise; they were not intentions lightly formed, according to the flesh, and then abandoned. It was his affection, it was to spare them. He could not bear the idea of going with a rod to those whom he loved. Observe in what manner, although showing his affection and tenderness, he maintains his authority; and they needed the exercise of this authority. And while reminding them of his authority, he displays all his tenderness. They were not Cretans, perhaps, whom it was necessary to rebuke sharply; but there was a laxity of morals which required delicacy and care lest they should become restive, but also authority and a bridle, lest, in giving them liberty, they should fall into all sorts of bad ways. But he turns immediately to the certainty which was in Christ, the basis of all his own. He would not press too much upon the chord he had touched at the beginning. He lets his authority be known as that which might have been exercised, and he does not employ it. The groundwork of Christianity was needed, in order to put their souls into a condition to judge themselves healthily. They were quite disposed, through the intrigues of false teachers and their habit of schools of philosophy, to separate from the apostle, and, in spirit, from Christ. He brings them back to the foundation, to the sure doctrine that was common to all those that had labored among them at the beginning. He would give Satan no occasion to detach them from him (see chap 2:11).

He establishes therefore the great principles of christian joy and assurance. I do not speak of the blood, the only source of peace of conscience before God as a judge, but of the manner in which we are placed by the power of God in His presence, in the position and state into which that power introduces us according to the counsels of His grace. Simple certainty was in Christ, according to that which had been said. It was not first Yea, and then Nay: the yea remained always yea — a principle of immense importance, but for the establishment of which there was needed the power and the firmness and even perfection, and the wisdom, of God; for to assure and make stedfast that which was not wise and perfect would certainly not have been worthy of Him.

It will be seen that the question was, whether Paul had lightly changed his purpose. He says that he had not; but he leaves the thought of that which concerned him personally to speak of that which pre-occupied his thoughts — of Christ; and to him, in fact, to live was Christ. But there was a difficulty to solve, when the immutability of God's promises was the question. It is that we are not in a state to profit by that which was immutable on account of our weakness and inconstancy. He solves this difficulty by setting forth the mighty operations of God in grace.

There are two points therefore: the establishment of all the promises in Christ, and the enjoyment, by us, of the effect of these promises. The thing is, as we have seen, not merely to say, to promise, something; but not to change one's intentions, not to depart from what was said, but to keep one's word. Now there had been promises. God had made promises, whether to Abraham unconditionally, or to Israel at Sinai under the condition of obedience. But in Christ there was, not promises, but the Amen to God's promises, the verity and realisation of them. Whatever promises there had been on God's part, the Yea was in Him, and the Amen in Him. God has established — deposited, so to speak — the fulfillment of all His promises in the Person of Christ. Life, glory, righteousness, pardon, the gift of the Spirit, all is in Him; it is in Him that all is we — Yea and Amen. We cannot have the effect of any promise whatsoever out of Him. But this is not all: we, believers, are the objects of these counsels of God. They are to the glory of God by us.

But, in the first place, the glory of God is that of Him whoever glorifies Himself in His ways of sovereign grace towards us; for it is in these ways that He unfolds and displays what He is. The Yea and Amen therefore of the promises of God, the accomplishment and the realisation of the promises of God, for His glory by us, are in Christ.

But how can we participate in it, if all is Christ and in Christ? It is here that the Holy Ghost presents the second part of the ways of grace. We are in Christ, and we are in Him not according to the instability of the will of man, and the weakness that characterises him in his transitory and changeable works. He who was firmly established us in Christ is God Himself. The accomplishment of all the promises is in Him. Under the law, and under conditions the fulfillment of which depended on the stability of

man, the effect of the promise was never attained; the thing promised eluded the pursuit of man, because man needed to be in a state capable of attaining it by righteousness, and he was not in that state; the accomplishment of the promise therefore was always suspended; it would have its effect if — but the “if” was not accomplished, and the Yea and Amen did not come. But all that God has promised is in Christ. The second part is the “by us,” and how far we enjoy it. We are firmly established by God in Christ, in whom all the promises subsist, so that we securely possess in Him all that is promised us. But we do not enjoy it as that which subsists in our own hands.

But, further, God Himself has anointed us. We have by Jesus received the Holy Ghost. God has taken care that we should understand by the Spirit that which is freely given us in Christ. But the Spirit is given to us, according to the counsels of God, for other things than understanding merely His gifts in Christ. He who has received Him is sealed. God has marked him with His seal, even as He marked Christ with His seal when He anointed Him after His baptism by John. Moreover the Spirit becomes the earnest, in our own hearts, of that which we shall fully possess hereafter in Christ. We understand the things that are given us in the glory; we are marked by the seal of God to enjoy them; we have the earnest of them in our hearts — our affections are engaged by them. Established in Christ, we have the Holy Ghost, who seals us when we believe, to bring us into the enjoyment, even while here below, of that which is in Christ.

Having again spoken of the care which manifested his affection for them, he expresses his conviction that that which had pained him had pained them also; and this was demonstrated by the way in which they had treated the transgressor. He exhorts them to receive again and comfort the poor guilty one, who was in danger of being entirely overwhelmed by the discipline that had been exercised towards him by the mass of the Christians; adding, that if the Christians forgave him his fault, he forgave it likewise. He would not that Satan should get any advantage through this case to bring in dissension between himself and the Corinthians; for Paul well knew what the enemy aimed at, the object with which he made use of this affair.

This gives him occasion to show how much he had them always in his heart. Coming to Troas for the gospel, and a wide door being opened to him, nevertheless he could not remain there, because he had not found Titus; and he left Troas and continued his journey into Macedonia. It will be remembered that, instead of passing by the western shores of the Archipelago, in order to visit Macedonia, taking Corinth on his way, and then returning by the same route, the apostle had sent Titus with his first letter, and had gone by way of Asia Minor, or the eastern coast of the sea, which led him to Troas, where Titus was to meet him. But not finding him at Troas, and being uneasy with regard to the Corinthians, he could not be satisfied with there being a work to be done at Troas, but journeyed on to meet Titus and repaired to Macedonia. There he found him, as we shall see presently. But this thought of having left Troas affected him, for in fact it is a serious thing, and painful to the heart, to miss an opportunity of preaching Christ, and the more so when people are disposed to receive Him, or at least to hear of Him. To have left Troas was indeed a proof of his affection for the Corinthians; and the apostle recalls the circumstance as a strong demonstration of that affection. He comforts himself for having missed this work of evangelisation by the thought that after all God led him as in triumph (not “caused him to triumph”). The gospel which he carried with him, the testimony of Christ, was like the perfume caused by burning aromatic drugs in triumphal processions — a token of death to some of the captives, of life to others. And this perfume of the gospel was pure in his hands. The apostle was not like some who adulterated the wine they furnished; he labored in christian integrity before God.

These words give rise to an exposition of the gospel in contrast with the law, which the false teachers mixed up with the gospel. He gives this exposition with the most touching appeal to the heart of the Corinthians, who had been converted through his means. Did he begin speaking of his ministry to commend himself anew, or did he need, as others, letters of commendation to them or from them? They were his letters of commendation, the striking proof of the power of his ministry, a proof which he carried always in his heart, ready to bring it forward on every occasion. He can say this now, being happy in their obedience. And why did they serve as a letter in his favor? Because in their faith they were the living expression of his doctrine. They were Christ’s letter of

commendation, which, by means of his ministry, had been written on the fleshy tables of the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost, as the law had been graven on tables of stone by God Himself.

This was Paul's confidence with regard to his ministry; his competency came from God for the ministry of the new covenant, not of the letter (not even the letter of this covenant, any more than the letter of anything else) but of the Spirit, the true force of the purpose of God, as the Spirit gave it. For the letter kills, as a rule imposed on man; the Spirit quickens, as the power of God in grace — the purpose of God communicated to the heart of man by the power of God, who imparted it to him that he might enjoy it. Now the subject of this ministry brought out the difference between it and the ministry of the law yet more strongly. The law, graven on stones, had been introduced with glory, although it was a thing that was to pass away as a means of relation between God and men. It was a ministry of death, for they were only to live by keeping it. Nor could it be otherwise ordered than on this principle. A law was to be kept; but man being already a sinner by nature and by will, having desires which the law forbade, that law could only be death to him — it was a ministry of death. It was a ministry of condemnation because the authority of God came in to give to the law the sanction of condemnation against every soul that should break it. It was a ministry of death and of condemnation because man was a sinner.

And observe, here, that to mingle grace with the law changes nothing in its effect, except to aggravate the penalty that results from it by aggravating the guilt of him who violated the law, inasmuch as he violated it in spite of the goodness and the grace. For it was still the law, and man was called to satisfy the responsibility under which the law placed him. "The soul that sinneth," said Jehovah to Moses, "will I blot out of my book." The figure used by the apostle shows that he is speaking of the second descent of Moses from Mount Sinai, when he had heard the name of Jehovah proclaimed, merciful and gracious. The face of Moses did not shine the first time that he came down: he broke the tables before he went into the camp. The second time God made all His goodness pass before him, and the face of Moses reflected the glory which he had seen, partial as it may have been. But Israel could not bear this reflection; for how can it be born, when it must judge the secrets of the heart after all? For, though grace had

been shown in sparing on Moses' intercession, the exigency of the law was still maintained, and every one was to suffer the consequences of his own disobedience. Thus the character of the law prevented Israel from understanding even the glory which was in the ordinances, as a figure of that which was better and permanent; and the whole system ordained by the hand of Moses was veiled to their eyes, and the people fell under the letter, even in that part of the law which was a testimony of things to be spoken afterwards. It was according to the wisdom of God that it should be so; for in this way all the effect of the law, as brought to bear on the heart and conscience of man, has been fully developed.

There are many Christians who make a law of Christ Himself, and in thinking of His love as a fresh motive to oblige them to love Him, think of it only as an obligation, a very great increase to the measure of the obligation which lies upon them, an obligation which they feel bound to satisfy. That is to say, they are still under the law, and consequently under condemnation.

But the ministry which the apostle fulfilled was not this; it was the ministry of righteousness and of the Spirit, not as requiring righteousness in order to stand before God, but as revealing it. Christ was this righteousness, made such on God's part for us; and we are made the righteousness of God in Him. The gospel proclaimed righteousness on God's part, instead of requiring it from man according to the law. Now the Holy Ghost could be the seal of that righteousness. He could come down upon the man Christ, because He was perfectly approved of God; He was righteous — the righteous One. He came down upon us, because we are made the righteousness of God in Christ. Thus it was the ministry of the Spirit; His power wrought in it. He was bestowed when that which it announced was received by faith; and with the Spirit they also received understanding of the mind and purposes of God, as they were revealed in the Person of a glorified Christ, in whom the righteousness of God was revealed and subsisted eternally before Him.

Thus the apostle unites, in the self-same thought, the mind of God in the word according to the Spirit, the glory of Christ who had been hidden in it under the letter, and the Holy Ghost Himself, who gave its force, revealed that glory, and, by dwelling and working in the believer, enables him to

enjoy it. Thus, where the Spirit was, there was liberty; they were no longer under the yoke of the law, of the fear of death, and of condemnation. They were in Christ before God, in peace before Him, according to perfect love and that favor which is better than life, even as it shone upon Christ, without a veil, according to the grace which reigns by righteousness. When it is said, "Now the Lord is that spirit," allusion is made to verse 6; verses 7-16 is a parenthesis. Christ glorified is the true thought of the Spirit which God had previously hidden under figures. And here is the practical result: they beheld the Lord with open (that is, with unveiled) face; they were able to do it. The glory of the face of Moses judged the thoughts and intents of the hearts, causing terror by threatening the disobedient and the sinner with death and condemnation. Who could stand in the presence of God? But the glory of the face of Jesus, a man on high, is the proof that all the sins of those who behold it are blotted out; for He who is there bore them all before He ascended, and He needed to put them all away in order to enter into that glory. We contemplate that glory by the Spirit, who has been given us in virtue of Christ's having ascended into it. He did not say, "I will go up; peradventure I shall make atonement." He made the atonement and went up. Therefore we gaze upon it with joy, we love to behold it: each ray that we see is the proof that in the eyes of God our sins are no more. Christ has been made sin for us; He is in the glory. Now, in thus beholding the glory with affection, with intelligence, taking delight in it, we are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the power of the Holy Ghost, who enables us to realise and to enjoy these things; and in this is christian progress. Thus the assembly too becomes the epistle of Christ.

The allusion made at the same time to the Jews at the end of the parenthesis, where the apostle makes a comparison between the two systems, is most touching. The veil, he says, is taken away in Christ. Nothing is now veiled. The glorious substance is accomplished. The veil is on the heart of the Jews, when they read the Old Testament. Now every time that Moses entered into the tabernacle to speak to God, or to hear Him, he took off his veil. Thus, says the apostle, when Israel shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

There is but one more remark to be made. "The things that remain"\* are the subject the gospel treats of, not the ministry which announces it — the

glory of the Person of Jesus Christ, the substance of that which the Jewish ordinances represented only in figure.

[\* See chapter 3:11.]

The apostle returns to the subject of his ministry in connection with his sufferings, showing that this doctrine of a Christ victorious over death, truly received into the heart, makes us victorious over all fear of death, and over all the sufferings that are linked with the earthen vessel in which this treasure is carried.

Having received this ministry of righteousness and of the Spirit, the foundation of which was Christ glorified beheld with open face, he not only used great boldness of speech, but his zeal was not abated, nor his faith enfeebled by difficulties. Moreover, with the courage which through grace was imparted to him by this doctrine, he held back nothing, weakened nothing of this glory; he did not corrupt the doctrine; he manifested it in all the purity and brightness in which he had received it. It was the word of God; such as he had received it, so they received it from him, the unaltered word of God; the apostle thus approving himself, commending himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God. All could not say this. The glory of the Lord Jesus was set forth by Paul's preaching in all the clearness and brightness of its revelation to himself. If, therefore, the good news which he proclaimed was hidden, it was not as in the case of Moses; not only was the glory of the Lord fully revealed with open face in Christ, it was also manifested without a veil in the pure preaching of the apostle. This is the link established between the glory accomplished in the Person of Christ, as the result of the work of redemption, and the ministry which, by the power of the Holy Ghost acting in the instrument chosen of the Lord, proclaimed this glory to the world, and made men responsible for the reception of the truth — responsible for submission to this glorious Christ, who announced Himself in grace from heaven, as having established righteousness for the sinner, and as inviting him to come freely and enjoy the love and the blessing of God.

Now there was no other means of coming to God. To set up any other would be to put aside and declare imperfect and insufficient that which Christ had done, and that which Christ was, and to produce something



better than He. But this was not possible: for that which he announced was the manifestation of the glory of God in the Person of the Son, in connection with the revelation of perfect love, and of the making good perfect and divine righteousness; so that the pure light was the happy abode of those who by this means entered into it. There could not be anything more, unless there was something more than God in the fullness of His grace and of His perfection. If then this revelation was hidden, it was in the case of those who were lost, whose minds were blinded by the God of this world, lest the light of the good news of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into their hearts.

This is translated “glorious gospel.” But we have seen that the fact of Christ’s being in glory, the glory of God being seen in His face, was the special subject of the preceding chapter. To that the apostle here alludes as characterising the gospel which he preached. It was the proof of the sin Christ had born being utterly put away, of victory over death, of the introduction of man into the presence of God in glory according to God’s eternal counsels of love. It was withal the full display of the divine glory in man according to grace, which the Holy Ghost takes to show to us in order to form us after the same likeness. It was the glorious ministration of righteousness, and of the Spirit, which opened the free way for man to God, even into the holiest, in entire liberty.

When Christ was thus proclaimed, there was either the joyful acceptance of the good news, submission of heart to the gospel, or else the blinding of Satan. For Paul did not preach himself (which others did not fail to do) but Jesus Christ the Lord, and himself their servant for Jesus’ sake. Because in fact (and this is another important principle) the shining forth of this gospel of the glory of Christ is the work of God’s power — of the same God who, by His word alone, caused the light instantaneously to shine out of the midst of darkness. He had shone into the apostle’s heart to give forth the light of the knowledge of His own glory in the face of Jesus Christ. The gospel shone forth by a divine operation similar to that which had, in the beginning, caused the light to shine out of darkness by a single word. The heart of the apostle was the vessel, the lamp, in which this light had been kindled to shine in the midst of the world before the eyes of men. It was the revelation of the glory which shone in the Person of Christ by the power of the Spirit of God in the heart of the apostle, in order that this

glory should shine out in the gospel before the world. It was the power of God which wrought in it, in the same manner as when light was caused by the word "Let there be light! and there was light." But the treasure of this revelation of the glory was deposited, in earthen vessels, in order that power which wrought in it should be of God alone, and not that of the instruments. In all, the weakness of the instrument showed itself in the trying circumstances which God, for this very purpose (among others), made the testimony pass through. Nevertheless the power of God was manifested in it so much the more evidently, from the vessel's showing its weakness in the difficulties that beset its path. The testimony was rendered, the work was done, the result was produced, even when man broke down and found himself without resource in presence of the opposition raised up against truth.

Afflicted by the tribulation, this was the vessel's part; not straitened, for God was with the vessel. Without means of escape, that was the vessel; yet not without resource, for God was with it. Persecuted, that was the vessel; not forsaken, for God was with it. Cast down, that was the vessel; but not destroyed, for God was with it. Always bearing about in his body the dying\* of the Lord Jesus (made like Him, in that the man as such was reduced to nothing), in order that the life of Jesus, which death could not touch, which has triumphed over death, should be manifested in his body, mortal as it was. The more the natural man was annihilated, the more was it evident that a power was there which was not of man. This was the principle, but it was morally realised in the heart by faith. As the Lord's servant, Paul realised in his heart the death of all that was human life, in order that the power might be purely of God through Jesus risen. But besides this, God made him realise these things by the circumstances through which he had to pass; for, as living in this world, he was always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, in order that the life of Jesus might be manifested in his mortal flesh. Thus death wrought in the apostle; what was merely of man, of nature and natural life, disappeared, in order that life in Christ, developing itself in him on the part of God and by His power, should work in the Corinthians by his means. What a ministry! A thorough trial of the human heart, a glorious calling, for a man to be thus assimilated to Christ, to be the vessel of the power of His pure life, and by means of an entire self-renunciation, even that of life itself, to be morally

like unto Jesus. What a position by grace! What a conformity to Christ! And yet in a way in which it passed through man's heart to reach man's heart (which indeed is of the essence of Christianity itself), not surely by man's strength, but God's made good in man's weakness.

[\* Or rather, "putting to death."

Therefore it was that the apostle could use the language of the Spirit of Christ in the Psalms, "I believed, and therefore have I spoken." That is to say, 'At whatever cost, in spite of everything, of all the danger, all the opposition, I have spoken for God, I have born my testimony. I have had confidence enough in God to bear testimony to Him and to His truth, whatever the consequences might be, even if I had died in doing it.' That is, the apostle said, 'I have acted as Christ Himself did, because I know that He who raised up Jesus would do the same for me, and would present me, together with you, before His face in that same glory in which Christ is now in heaven, and for my testimony to which, I have suffered death like Him.' We must clearly distinguish here between Christ's sufferings for righteousness and for His work of love, and His sufferings for sin. The former it is our privilege to share with Him; in the latter He is alone.

The apostle said, "will present me with you," for, he adds, according to the heart and mind of Christ towards His own, "all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God." And therefore it was that he did not allow himself to be discouraged; but on the contrary, if the outward man perished, the inward man was renewed day by day. For the light affliction, which was but for a moment (for such he esteemed it in view of the glory — it was but the temporary affliction of this poor dying body), worked out for him an eternal weight of glory which was beyond all the most exalted expression of human thought or language. And this renewing took place; and he was not disheartened come what might, in that he looked not at the things that are seen, which are temporal, but at the things that are not seen, which are eternal. Thus the power of the divine life, with all its consequences, was developed in his soul by faith. He knew the result of everything on God's part.

It was not only that there were things invisible and glorious. Christians had their part in them. We know, the apostle says in their name, that if this

earthly house (passing away as it is) were destroyed — and it had very nearly been the case with himself — we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Precious certainty! He knew it. Christians know it as a part of their faith. We know\* a certainty which caused this glory, which he knew to be his, to be a real and practical hope in the heart by the power of the Holy Ghost — a reality present by faith. He saw this glory as that which belonged to him, with which he was to be invested. And therefore also he groaned in his tabernacle, not (as so many do) because the desires of his flesh could not be fulfilled; and because satisfaction of heart cannot be found for man, even when those desires are fulfilled; nor because he was uncertain whether he was accepted, and the glory his or not; but because the body was a hindrance, tending to depress the divine life, to deprive him of the full enjoyment of that glory which the new life saw and desired, and which Paul saw and admired as his own. It was a burden, this earthly human nature; it was no distress to him that he could not satisfy its desires; his distress was to find himself still in this mortal nature, because he saw something better.

[\* This “we know” is in fact a technical expression for the portion of Christians, known to them as such. “We know that the law is spiritual,” “we know that the Son of God is come,” and so on.]

Not however that he desired to be unclothed, for he saw in Christ glorified a power of life capable of swallowing up and annihilating every trace of mortality; for the fact that Christ was on high in the glory was the result of this power, and at the same time the manifestation of the heavenly portion that belonged to them that were His. Therefore the apostle desired, not to be unclothed but clothed upon, and that that which was mortal in him should be absorbed by life, that the mortality that characterised his earthly human nature should disappear before the power of life which he saw in Jesus, and which was his life. That power was such that there was no need to die. And this was not a hope which had no other foundation than the desire awakened by a view of the glory might produce: God had formed Christians for this very thing. He who was a Christian was formed for this, and not for anything else. It was God Himself who had formed him for this — this glory, in which Christ, the last Adam, was at the right hand of God. Precious assurance! Happy confidence in the grace and the mighty work of God! Ineffable joy to be able to attribute all to God Himself, to be thus certified of His love, to glorify Him as the God of love — our Benefactor,

to know that it was His work, and that we rest upon a finished work — the work of God. It is not here resting upon a work done for us; but the blessed consciousness that God has wrought us for this: we are His workmanship.

Nevertheless something else was necessary to our enjoying this, since we are not yet glorified in fact; and God has given it — the earnest of the Spirit.

Thus, we have the glory before us, we are wrought for it by God Himself, and we have the earnest of the Spirit till we are there, and know that Christ has so entirely overcome death that, if the time were come, we should be transformed into glory without dying at all. Mortality would be swallowed up of life. This is our portion through grace in the last Adam, through the power of life in which Christ was raised.

But next the apostle will treat of the effect as to the natural portion of the first fallen man, death and judgment; for the testimony here is very complete.

What then is the effect of the possession of life in Christ as applied to death and judgment, the two natural objects of men's fears, the fruit of sin? If our bodies are not yet transformed; and if that which is mortal is not yet swallowed up, we are equally full of confidence, because, being formed for glory, and Christ (who has manifested the victorious power that opened the path of heaven to Him) being our life, if we should leave this tabernacle and be absent from the body before we are clothed upon with the glory, this life remains untouched; it has already in Jesus triumphed over all these effects of the power of death. We should be present with the Lord; for we walk by faith, not by the sight of these excellent things. Therefore we prefer to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. For this reason we seek to be well-pleasing to Him, whether we are found absent from this body, or present in this body, when Christ shall come to take us to Himself and make us share His glory.

And this leads on to the second point — judgment. For we must all be manifested before the tribunal of Christ, in order that each may receive according to that which he shall have done in the body, be it good or evil. A happy and precious thought, after all, solemn as it may be; for, if we

have really understood grace, if we are standing in grace, if we know what God is, all love for us, all light for us, we shall like to be in the full light. It is a blessed deliverance to be in it. It is a burden, an encumbrance, to have anything concealed, and although we have had much sin in us that no one knows (perhaps even some that we have committed, and which it would be no profit for any one to know), it is a comfort — if we know the perfect love of God — that all should be in perfect light since He is there. This is the case by faith and for faith, wherever there is solid peace: we are before God as He is, and as we are — all sin in ourselves alas! except so far as He has wrought in us by quickening us; and He is all love in this light in which we are placed; for God is light, and He reveals Himself. Without the knowledge of grace, we fear the light: it cannot be otherwise. But knowing grace, knowing that sin has been put away as regards the glory of God, and that the offense is no longer before His eyes, we like to be in the light, it is joy to us, it is that which the heart needs, without which it cannot be satisfied, when there is the life of the new man. Its nature is to love the light, to love purity in all that perfection which does not admit the evil of darkness, which shuts out all that is not itself. Now to be thus in the light, and to be manifested, is the same thing, for the light makes everything manifest.

We are in the light by faith when the conscience is in the presence of God. We shall be according to the perfection of that light when we appear before the tribunal of Christ. I have said that it is a solemn thing — and so it is, for everything is judged according to that light; but it is that which the heart loves, because — thanks to our God! — we are light in Christ.

But there is more than this. When the Christian is thus manifested, he is already glorified, and, perfectly like Christ, has then no remains of the evil nature in which he sinned. And he now can look back at all the way God has led him in grace, helped, lifted up, kept from falling, not withdrawn His eyes from the righteous. He knows as he is known. What a tale of grace and mercy! If I look back now, my sins do not rest on my conscience; though I have horror of them, they are put away behind God's back. I am the righteousness of God in Christ, but what a sense of love and patience, and goodness and grace! How much more perfect then, when all is before me! Surely there is great gain as to light and love, in giving an account of ourselves to God; and not a trace remains of the evil in us. We

are like Christ. If a person fears to have all out thus before God, I do not believe he is free in soul as to righteousness — being the righteousness of God in Christ, not fully in the light. And we have not to be judged for anything: Christ has put it all away.

But there is another idea in the passage — retribution. The apostle does not speak of judgment on persons, because the saints are included, and Christ has stood in their place for all that regards the judgment of their persons: “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.” They do not come into judgment. But they shall be manifested before His tribunal, and receive that which they have done in the body. The good deserves nothing: they received that by which they have wrought what is good — grace produced it in them; nevertheless they shall receive its reward. What they have done is counted as their own act. If, by neglecting grace and the witness of the Spirit in them, the fruits which He would have produced have been turned aside, they will bear the consequences. It is not that, in this case, God will have forsaken them; it is not that the Holy Ghost will not act in them with regard to the condition they are in; but it will be in their conscience that He acts, judging the flesh which has prevented the man’s bearing the natural fruit of His presence and operation in the new man. So that the Holy Ghost will have done all that is necessary with respect to their state of heart; and the perfect counsel of God with regard to the person will have been accomplished, His patience manifested, His wisdom, His ways in governing, the care which He deigns to take of each one individually in His most condescending love. Each one will have his place, as it was prepared for him of the Father. But the natural fruit of the presence and operation of the Holy Ghost in a soul which has (or, according to the advantages it has enjoyed, ought to have had) a certain measure of light, will not have been produced. It will be seen what it was that prevented. It will judge, according to the judgment of God, all that was good and evil in itself, with a solemn reverence for that which God is, and a fervent adoration on account of what He has been for us. The perfect light will be appreciated; the ways of God known and understood in all their perfection, by the application of the perfect light to the whole course of our life and of His dealings with us, in which we shall thoroughly recognise that love — perfect, sovereign above all things — has reigned, with ineffable grace.

Thus the majesty of God will have been maintained by His judgment, at the same time that the perfection and tenderness of His dealings will be the eternal recollection of our souls. Light without cloud or darkness will be understood in its own perfection. To understand it is to be in it and to enjoy it. And light is God Himself. How wonderful to be thus manifested! What love is that which in its perfect wisdom, in its marvelous ways overruling all evil, could bring such beings as we are to enjoy this unclouded light — beings knowing good and evil (the natural prerogative of those only of whom God can say “one of us”), under the yoke of the evil which they knew, and driven out by a bad conscience from the presence of God, to whom that knowledge belonged, having testimony enough in their conscience as to the judgment of God, to make them avoid Him and be miserable, but nothing to draw them to Him who alone could find a remedy! What love and holy wisdom which could bring such to the source of good, of pure happiness, in whom the power of good repels absolutely the evil which it judges!

With regard to the unrighteous, at the judgment-day they will have to answer personally for their sins, under a responsibility which rests entirely on themselves.

However great the happiness of being in the perfect light (and this happiness is complete and divine in its character), it is on the side of conscience that the subject is here presented. God maintains His majesty by the judgment which He executes, as it is written, “The Lord is known by the judgment that he executeth”: there, in His government of the world; here, final, eternal, and personal judgment. And, for my part, I believe that it is very profitable for the soul to have the judgment of God present to our minds, and the sense of the unchangeable majesty of God maintained in the conscience by this means. If we were not under grace, it would be — it ought to be — insupportable; but the maintenance of this sentiment does not contradict grace. It is indeed only under grace that it can be maintained in its truth; for who otherwise could bear the thought, for an instant, of receiving that which he had done in the body? None but he who is completely blinded.

But the authority, the holy authority of God, which asserts itself in judgment, forms a part of our relationship with Him; the maintenance of



this sentiment, associated with the full enjoyment of grace, a part of our Holy Spiritual affections. It is the fear of the Lord. It is in this sense, that “Happy is he who feareth always.” If this weakens the conviction that the love of God rests fully, eternally, upon us, then we get off the only possible ground of any relation whatever with God, unless perdition could be so called. But, in the sweet and peaceful atmosphere of grace, conscience maintains its rights and its authority against the subtle encroachments of the flesh, through the sense of God’s judgment, in virtue of a holiness which cannot be separated from the character of God without denying that there is a God: for if there is a God, He is holy. This sentiment engages the heart of the accepted believer, to endeavor to please the Lord in every way; and, in the sense of how solemn a thing it is for a sinner to appear before God, the love that necessarily accompanies it in a believer’s heart urges him to persuade men with a view to their salvation, while maintaining his own conscience in the light. And he who is now walking in the light, whose conscience reflects that light, will not fear it in the day when it shall appear in its glory. We must be manifested; but, walking in the light in the sense of the fear of God, realising His judgment of evil, we are already manifested to God: nothing hinders the sweet and assured flow of His love. Accordingly the walk of such a one justifies itself in the end to the consciences of others; one is manifested as walking in the light.

These are therefore the two great practical principles of the ministry: to walk in the light, in the sense of God’s solemn judgment for every one; and, the conscience being thus pure in the light, the sense of the judgment (which in this case cannot trouble the soul for itself, or obscure its view of the love of God) impels the heart to seek in love those who are in danger of this judgment. This connects itself with the doctrine of Christ, the Savior, through His death upon the cross; and the love of Christ constrains us, because we see that, if one died for all, it is that all were dead. This was the universal condition of souls. The apostle seeks them in order that they may live unto God by Christ. But this goes farther. First, as regards fallen man’s lot, death is gain. The saint, if absent from the body, is present with the Lord. As to judgment, he owns the solemnity of it, but it does not make him tremble. He is in Christ — will be like Christ; and Christ, before whom he is to appear, has put away all the sins he had to be judged for.

The effect is the sanctifying one of bringing him fully manifested into the presence of God now. But it stimulates his love as to others, nor is it only by fear of judgment to come for them; Christ's love constrains him love manifested in death. But this proves more than the acts of sin which bring judgment: Christ died because all were dead. The Spirit of God goes to the source and spring of their whole condition, their state, not merely the fruits of an evil nature — all were dead. We find the same important instruction in John 5:24, "He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment that which applies to sins], but is passed from death unto life"; he has come out of the whole state and condition, as an already lost one, into another and different one in Christ. This is a very important aspect of the truth. And the distinction, largely developed in Romans, is found in many passages.

The work of manifestation before God in the light is already true, in so far as we have realised the light. Cannot I, being now in peace, look back at what I was before conversion, and at all my failures since my conversion, humbled but adoring the grace of God in all He has done for me, but without a thought of fear, or imputation of sin? Does not this awaken a very deep sense of all that God is in holy grace and love, in unbounded patience towards me, both keeping and helping and restoring? Such will be the case perfectly when we are manifested, when we shall know as we are known.

That this point may be still more clear, for it is an important one, let me add some further observations here. What we find in this passage is the perfect manifestation of all that a person is and has been before a throne characterised by judgment, without judgment as to the person in question being guilty. No doubt when the wicked receives the things done in the body, he is condemned. But it is not said "judged" here, because all then must be condemned. But this manifestation is exactly what brings all morally before the heart, when it is capable of judging evil for itself: were it under judgment, it could not. Freed from all fear, and in the perfect light and with the comfort of perfect love (for where we have the conscience of sin, and of its not being imputed, we have the sense, though in a humbling way, of perfect love), and at the same time the sense of authority and divine government fully made good in the soul, all is judged by the soul

itself as God judges it, and communion with Himself entered into. This is exceedingly precious.

We have to remember that, at our appearing before the judgment-seat of Christ, we are already glorified. Christ has come Himself in perfect love to fetch us; and has changed our vile body according to the resemblance of His glorious body. We are glorified and like Christ before the judgment takes place. And mark the effect on Paul. Does the thought of being manifested awaken anxiety or dread? Not the least. He realizes all the solemnity of such a process. He knows the terror of the Lord; he has it before his eyes; and what is the consequence? He sets about to persuade others who are in need of it.

There are, so to speak, two parts in God's nature and character: His righteousness, which judges everything; and His perfect love. These are one for us in Christ, ours in Christ. If indeed we realise what God is, both will have their place: but the believer in Christ is the righteousness which God, from His very nature, must have before Him on His throne, if we are to be with Him and enjoy Him. But the Christ, in the judgment-seat, before whom we are, is our righteousness. He judges by the righteousness which He is; but we are that righteousness, the righteousness of God in Him. Hence this point can raise no question in the soul, will make us adore such grace, but can raise no question, only enhance the sense we have of grace ourselves, make us understand it, as suited to man as he is, and feel the solemn and awful consequences of not having part in it, since there is such a judgment. Hence that other and indeed essential part of the divine nature, love, will work in us towards others; and, knowing the terror of the Lord, we shall persuade men. Thus Paul (it is conscience in view of that most solemn moment) possessed the righteousness which he saw in the Judge, for that which judged was His righteousness; but then he consequently seeks others earnestly, according to the work which had thus brought him near to God, to which he then turns (v. 13, 14). But this view of judgment and our complete manifestation in that day, has a present effect on the saint according to its own nature. He realizes it by faith. He is manifested. He does not fear being manifested. It will unfold all God's past ways towards him when he is in glory; but he is manifested now to God, his conscience exercised in the light. It has thus a present sanctifying power.

Observe here the assemblage of powerful motives, of pre-eminently important principles; contradictory in appearance, but which, to a soul which walks in light, instead of clashing and destroying each other, unite to give its complete and thoroughly furnished character to the christian minister and ministry.

First of all, the glory, in such a power of life, that he who realizes it does not desire death, because he sees in the power of life in Christ that which can absorb whatever in him is mortal, and he sees it with the certainty of enjoying it — such a consciousness of possessing this life (God having formed him for it, and given him the earnest of the Spirit), that death if it arrive to him is but a happy absence from the body in order to be present with the Lord.

Now the thought of ascending to Christ gives the desire of being acceptable to Him, and presents Him (the second motive or principle that gives a form to this ministry) as the Judge who will render to every one that which he has done. The solemn thought of how much this judgment is to be feared takes possession of the apostle's heart. What a difference between this thought and the "building of God," for which he was waiting with certainty! Nevertheless this thought does not alarm him; but, in the solemn sense of the reality of that judgment, it impels him to persuade others.

But here a third principle comes in, the love of Christ with reference to the condition of those whom Paul sought to persuade. Since this love of Christ's shows itself in His death, there is in it the witness that all were already dead and lost.

Thus we have here set before us glory, with the personal certainty of enjoying it, and death become the means of being present with the Lord; the tribunal of Christ, and the necessity of being manifested before it; and the love of Christ in His death, all being already dead. How are such diverse principles as these to be reconciled and arranged in the heart? It is that the apostle was manifested to God. Hence the thought of being manifested before the tribunal produced, along with the present sanctification, no other effect on him than that of solemnity, for he was not to come into judgment; but it became an urgent motive for preaching to others, according to the love which Christ had manifested in His death.

The idea of the tribunal did not in the least weaken his certainty of glory.\* His soul, in the full light of God, reflected what was in that light, namely, the glory of Christ ascended on high as man. And the love of this same Jesus was strengthened in its active operation in him by the sense of the tribunal which awaits all men.

[\* The truth is, the judgment-seat is what most brings out our assurance before God; for as He is, so are we in this world; and it is when Christ shall appear we shall be like Him.]

What a marvelous combination of motives we find in this passage, to form a ministry characterised by the development of all that in which God reveals Himself, and by which He acts on the heart and conscience of man! And it is in a pure conscience that these things can have their force together. If the conscience were not pure, the tribunal would obscure the glory, at least as belonging to oneself, and weaken the sense of His love. At any rate one would be occupied with self in connection with these things, and ought to be so. But when pure before God, it only sees a tribunal which excites no sense of personal uneasiness, and therefore has all its true moral effect, as an additional motive for seriousness in our walk, and a solemn energy in the appeal which the known love of Jesus impels it to address to man.

As to how far our own relations with God enter into the service which we have to render to others, the apostle adds another thing that characterised his walk, and that was the result of the death and resurrection of Christ. He lived in an entirely new sphere, in a new creation, which had left behind, as in another world, all that belonged to a natural existence in the flesh here below. The proof that Christ had died for all proved that all were dead; and that He died for all in order that those who live should live no longer to themselves but to Him who died for them and rose again. They are in connection with this new order of things in which Christ exists as risen. Death is on everything else. Everything is shut up under death. If I live, I live in a new order of things, in a new creation, of which Christ is the type and the head. Christ, so far as in connection with this world below, is dead. He might have been known as the Messiah, living on the earth, and in connection with promises made to men living on the earth in the flesh. The apostle no longer knew Him thus. In fact Christ, as bearing

that character, was dead; and now, being risen, He has taken a new and a heavenly character.

Therefore if any one is in Christ, he belongs to this new creation, he is of the new creation. He belongs no more at all to the former; the old things have passed away; all things are I become new. The system is not the fruit of human nature and of sin, like all that surrounds us here below, according to the I flesh. Already, looked at as a system existing morally before God, in this new creation, all things are of God. All that is found in it is of God, of Him who has reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ. We live in an order of things, a world, a new creation, entirely of God. We are there in peace, because God, who is its center and its source, has reconciled us to Himself. We enjoy it, because we are new creatures in Christ; and everything in this new world is of Him, and corresponds with that new nature. He had also committed to the apostle a ministry of reconciliation, according to the order of things into which he had been himself introduced. Being reconciled, and knowing it by the revelation of God who had accomplished it for him, he proclaimed a reconciliation, the effect of which he was enjoying.

All this flowed from an immense and all-powerful truth. God was in Christ. But then, in order that others might have a part with him, and the apostle be the minister of this, it was also necessary that Christ should be made sin for us. One of these truths presents the character in which God has drawn nigh to us, the other, the efficacy of that which has been wrought for the believer.

Here is the first of these truths, in connection with the apostle's ministry, which form the subject of these chapters. God was in Christ (that is to say, when Christ was on earth). The day of judgment had not been waited for. God had come down in love into the world alienated from Him. Such was Christ. Three things were connected with and characterised this great and essential truth: reconciling the world, not imputing transgression, and putting the word of reconciliation into the apostle. As the result of this third consequence of the incarnation, the apostle assumes the character of ambassador for Christ, as though God exhorted by his means, he besought men, in the name of Christ, to be reconciled to God. But such an embassy supposed the absence of Christ; His ambassador acted in His stead. It was

in fact based upon another truth of immeasurable importance, namely, that God had made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, in order that we should be made the righteousness of God in Him. This was the true way to reconcile us, and that entirely, to God, according to the perfection of God fully revealed. For He had set His love upon us where we were, giving His Son, who was without spot or motion or principle of sin; and making Him (for He offered Himself to accomplish the will of God) sin for us, in order to make us in Him — who in that condition had perfectly glorified Him — the expression of His divine righteousness, before the heavenly principalities through all eternity; to make us His delight, as regards righteousness; “that we should be the righteousness of God in him.” Man has no righteousness for God: God has made the saints, in Jesus, His righteousness. It is in us that this divine righteousness is seen fully verified — of course in Christ first, in setting Him at His right hand, and in us as in Him. Marvellous truth! which, if its results in us cause thanksgiving and praise to resound when looking at Jesus, silences the heart, and bows it down in adoration, astonished at the sight of His wonderful acts in grace.\*

[\* It should be observed that, in verse 20, the word “you” ought to be omitted. It was the way in which the apostle fulfilled his ministry to the world.]

Paul had said that God exhorted by his means. In chapter 6 the affection of the apostle carries on by the Spirit this divine work, beseeching the Corinthians that it might not be in vain in their case that this grace had been brought to them. For it was the acceptable time, the day of salvation.\* The apostle had spoken of the great principles of his ministry, and of its origin. He reminds the Corinthians of the way in which he had exercised it in the varied circumstances through which he had been led. The cardinal point of his service is that he was the minister of God, that he represented Him in his service. This rendered two things needful: first, that he should be in all things without reproach; and then that he should maintain this character of God’s minister, and the exercise of his ministry, through all the opposition, and in all the circumstances through which the enmity of man’s heart, and the cunning even of Satan, could make him pass. Everywhere and in all things he avoided, by his conduct, all real occasion of being reproached, in order that no one should have room to blame the ministry. He approved himself in all things as a minister of God, worthily representing Him in whose name he spoke to men; and that with

a patience, and in the midst of persecution and contradiction of sinners, which showed an inward energy, a sense of obligation to God, and a dependence on Him, which the realisation of His presence and of our duty to Him can alone maintain. It was a quality which reigned through all the circumstances of which the apostle speaks, and had dominion over them.

[\* The passage is a quotation from Isaiah 49:8, which speaks of the blessing that should be brought to the Gentiles when Christ was rejected by the Jews, but through Christ's work and by the resurrection.]

Thus he showed himself to be the minister of God in everything which could test him; in pureness, in kindness, in love; as a vessel of power; whether disgraced or applauded; unknown to the world, and known and eminent; outwardly trodden under foot of man and chastened, inwardly victorious and joyful, enriching others, and in possession of all things. Here ends his description of the sources, the character, the victory over circumstances, of a ministry which displayed the power of God in a vessel of weakness, whose best portion was death.

The restoration of the Corinthians to a moral state befitting the gospel, associated with the circumstances through which he had just been passing, had allowed him to open his heart to them. Pre-occupied till now with his subject of the glorious Christ, who, having accomplished redemption, sent him as the messenger of the grace to which that redemption had given free course, and having spoken with a free heart of all that was comprised in his ministry, he returns with affection to his beloved Corinthians, showing that it was with them that he had all this openness, this enlargement of heart. "My mouth is open unto you, O Corinthians," he says, "my heart is enlarged; ye are not straitened in me, but in your own affections." As a recompense for the affections that overflowed from his heart towards them, he only asks for the enlargement of their own hearts.

He spoke as to his children. But he avails himself of this tender relationship to exhort the Corinthians to maintain the place in which God had set them: "Be not in the same yoke with unbelievers." Having a hold upon their affections, and rejoicing deeply before God in the grace which had restored them to right sentiments, his heart is free to give way, as though beside himself, to the joy that belonged to him in Christ glorified: and, with a sober mind after all when his dear children in the faith were in question,\* he seeks to detach them from all that recognised the flesh, or



implied that a relationship which recognised it were possible for a Christian — from everything that denied the position of a man who has his life and his interests in the new creation, of which Christ is the Head in glory. An angel can serve God in this world: little would it concern him in what way, provided that way was God's; but to associate himself with its interests, as forming a part of it, to ally himself with those who are governed by the motives that influence the men of this world, so that a common conduct would show that the one and the other acted according to the principles that form its character, would be, to those heavenly beings, to lose their position and their character. The Christian, whose portion is the glory of Christ — who has his world, his life, his true associations, there where Christ has entered in — should not either; nor can he, as a Christian, put himself under the same yoke with those who can have only worldly motives, to draw the chariot of life in a path common to both.

- [\* What a blessed state is that of a man, who, when he is taken out of himself and a state of calm reflection, is entirely absorbed with, or turned towards, God, and, when he does think soberly and calculates, is occupied in love in seeking the good of his brethren, the members of Christ: who is either rapt up into the contemplation of God and communion with Him, or filled with Him, so as to think only of others in love!

What communion is there between Christ and Belial; between light and darkness; faith and unbelief; the temple of God and idols? Christians are the temple of the living God who dwells and walks among them. He is a God to them; they are a people to Him. Therefore must they come out from all fellowship with the worldly, and be separate from them. As Christians, they must stand apart, for they are the temple of God. God dwells among them and walks there, and He is their God. They are therefore to come out from the world and be separate, and God will own them, and will be to them in relationship of a Father with sons and daughters who are dear to Him.

This, observe, is the special relationship which God assumes with us. The two preceding revelations of God with men are named here, and He takes a third. To Abraham He revealed Himself as Almighty; to Israel as Jehovah or Lord. Here the Lord Almighty declares that He will be a Father to His own, to His sons and daughters. We come out from among the worldly, for it is just that (not physically out of the world, but while in it), in order to enter into the relationship of sons and daughters to the Almighty God:

otherwise we cannot practically realise this relationship. God will not have worldlings in relation with Himself as sons and daughters; they have not entered into this position with regard to Him. Nor will He recognise those who remain identified with the world, as having this position; for the world has rejected His Son, and the friendship of the world is enmity against God: and he who is the friend of the world is the enemy of God. It is not being His child in a practical sense. God says therefore, “Come out from among them, and be separate, and ye shall be to me for sons and daughters.” Remember that it is not a question of coming out of the world — it is while we are in it — but of coming out from among the worldly, to enter into the relationship of sons and daughters, in order to be to Him for sons and daughters, to be owned of Him in this relationship.\*

[\* The reader may remark that the passage sets two things before us: that God is present in the assembly of those who are separated from the world, and walks among them, as He did in the case of Israel in the wilderness when they had come out of Egypt; and that the individuals who compose the assembly enter into the relationship of sons and daughters.]

But it is not only that from which we are separated to be in this position of sons and daughters that engages the apostle’s attention, but the legitimate consequences of such promises. Sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty, holiness becomes us. It is not only that we are to be separate from the world; but, in relationship with God, to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit: holiness in the outward walk, and that which is quite as important with regard to our relationship to God, purity of thought. For, although man does not see the thoughts, the flow of the Spirit is stopped in the heart. There is not enlargement of heart in communion with God, It is much if His presence is felt, His relationship to us realised; grace is known, but God scarcely at all, in the way in which He makes Himself gradually known in communion.

The apostle returns to his own relationships with the Corinthians — relations formed by the word of his ministry. And now having laid open what this ministry really was, he seeks to prevent the bonds being broken, which had been formed by this ministry between the Corinthians and himself through the power of the Holy Ghost.

“Receive us: we have wronged no one” — he is anxious not to wound the feelings of these restored ones, who found themselves again in their old

affection for the apostle, and thus in their true relation with God. "I do not say this to condemn you," he adds; "for I have said before that ye are in my heart to die and live with you. My boldness is great towards you, great is my glorying of you. I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all my tribulation." He is not now unfolding the principles of the ministry, but the heart of a minister, all that he had felt with regard to the state of the Corinthians. When he had arrived in Macedonia (whither, it will be remembered, he had gone without visiting Corinth), after he had left Troas, because he did not find Titus there, who was to bring him the answer to his first letter to the Corinthians — when he was come into Macedonia, his flesh had no rest there either; he was troubled on every side: without were fightings, within were fears. There however God, who comforts those who are cast down, comforted him by the arrival of Titus, for whom he had waited with so much anxiety; and not only by his coming, but by the good news he brought from Corinth. His joy went beyond all his sorrow, for his heart was to die and live with them. He saw the moral fruits of the operation of the Spirit, their desire, their tears, their zeal with regard to the apostle; and his heart turns again to them in order to bind up, by the expression of his affection, all the wounds (needful as they were) which his first letter might have made in their hearts.

Nothing more touching than the conflict in his heart between the necessity he had felt, on account of their previous state, to write to them with severity, and in some sort with a cold authority, and the affections which, now that the effect had been produced, dictated almost an apology for the grief he might have caused them. If, he says, I made you sorry by the letter, I do not repent: even though he might have repented and had done so for a moment. For he saw that the letter had grieved them, were it but for a season. But now he rejoiced, not that they had been made sorry, but that they had sorrowed unto repentance. What solicitude! What a heart for the good of the saints! If they had a fervent mind towards him, assuredly he had given them the occasion and the motive. No rest till he had tidings: nothing, not open doors, nor distress, could remove his anxiety. He regrets perhaps having written the letter, fearing that he had alienated the hearts of the Corinthians; and now, still pained at the thought of having grieved them, he rejoices, not at having grieved them, but because their godly sorrow had wrought repentance.

He writes a letter according to the energy of the Holy Ghost. Left to the affections of his heart, we see him, in this respect, below the level of the energy of inspiration which had dictated that letter which the spiritual were to acknowledge as the commandments of the Lord; his heart trembles at the thought of its consequences, when he receives no tidings. It is very interesting to see the difference between the individuality of the apostle and inspiration. In the first letter we remarked the distinction which he makes between that which he said as the result of his experience, and the commandments of the Lord communicated through him. Here we find the difference in the experience itself. He forgets the character of his epistle for a moment, and, given up to his affections, he fears to have lost the Corinthians by the effort he had made to reclaim them. The form of the expression he uses shows that it was but for a moment that this sentiment took possession of his heart. But the fact that he had it plainly shows the difference between Paul the individual and Paul the inspired writer.

Now he is satisfied. The expression of this deep interest which he feels for them is a part of his ministry, and valuable instruction for us, to show the way in which the heart enters into the exercise of this ministry, the flexibility of this mighty energy of love, in order to win and bend hearts by the opportune expression of that which is passing in our own: an expression which will assuredly take place when the occasion makes it right and natural, if the heart is filled with affection; for a strong affection likes to make itself known to its object, if possible, according to the truth of that affection. There is a grief of heart which consumes it, but a heart that feels godly sorrow is on the way to repentance.\*

[\* Greatness of heart does not readily talk about feelings, because it thinks of others, not of itself. But it is not afraid, when occasion arises, to do so; because it thinks of others, and has a depth of purpose in its affections, which is behind all this movement of them. And Christianity gives greatness of heart. And besides, from its nature, it is confiding, and this wins, and gives unsought, influence this greatness of heart does not seek, for it is unselfish. His true relationship for their good the apostle did maintain.]

The apostle then sets forth the fruits of this godly sorrow, the zeal against sin it had produced, the heart's holy rejection of all association with sin. Now also that they had morally separated themselves, he separates those who were not guilty from those who were so. He will no longer confound them together. They had confounded themselves together morally by

walking at ease with those who were in sin. By putting away the sin they were now outside the evil: and the apostle shows that it was with a view to their good, because he was devoted to them, that he had written to testify the loving occupation of his thoughts about them, and to put to the test their love for him before God. Sad as their walk had been, he had assured Titus, when encouraging him to go to Corinth, that he would certainly find hearts there that would respond to this appeal of apostolic affection. He had not been disappointed, and as he had declared the truth among them, that which he had said of them to Titus was found true also, and the affections of Titus himself were strongly awakened when he saw it.

In the next chapter the apostle (being on his way to Judea) exhorts the Corinthians to prepare relief for the poor of Israel; sending Titus that all might be ready as of a willing mind — a disposition of which he had spoken on his journey as existing among these Christians, so that others had been stirred up to give likewise. And now, while reckoning upon their goodwill, and knowing that they had begun a year before, he would run no risk of finding that facts gave the lie to what he had said of them. Not that he would burden the Corinthians and ease those of Judea, but that the rich should provide for the need of the poor brethren, in order that none should be in want. Every one, if his will were in it, should be accepted of God according to his ability. He loved a cheerful giver. Only they should reap according as they sowed. Titus, happy at the result of his first visit, and attached to the Corinthians, was ready to go again and gather this fruit also for their own blessing. With him went the messengers of the other churches, charged with the collection made among them for the same purpose — a brother known to all the churches, and another of approved diligence, stimulated by Paul's confidence in the Corinthians. The apostle would not take charge of the money without having companions whose charge it should also be, avoiding all possibility of reproach in affairs of this kind, taking care that everything should be honest before men as well as before God. Nevertheless he did not speak by commandment in all this, but on account of the zeal of other churches, and to prove the sincerity of their love.

It will be remembered that it was this collection which occasioned all that happened to Paul at Jerusalem — that which put an end to his ministry,

stopped him on his way into Spain, and perhaps other places; and which, on the other hand, gave occasion to write the epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and, it may be, to the Hebrews. How little we know the bearing of the circumstances we enter upon, happy that we are led by Him who knows the end from the beginning, and who makes all things work for good to those who love Him!

In closing those exhortations to give according to their ability, he commends them to the rich goodness of God, who was able to make them abound in all things, so that they should be in circumstances to multiply their good works, enriched to all bountifulness, so as to produce in others (by means of the apostle's services in this respect) thanksgiving unto God. For, he adds, the happy effect of your practical charity, exercised in the name of Christ, would not only supply the want of the saints (through his administration of the collection made at Corinth) but abound also in thanksgiving to God; for, those who received it blessed God that their benefactors had been brought to confess the name of Christ, and to act with this practical liberality to them and to all. And this thought stirred them up to pray with fervent desire for those who provided in this way for their need, because of the grace of God manifested in them. Thus the bonds of eternal charity were strengthened on both sides, and glory redounded to God. Thanks be to God, says the apostle, for His unspeakable gift; for whatsoever may be the fruits of grace, we have the proof and the power in that which God has given. Here ends the matter of the epistle properly so called.

The apostle returns to the subject which pre-occupied him — his connections with the Corinthians, and the truth of his apostleship, which was questioned by those who seduced them, throwing contempt on his person. He was weak, they said, when present, and his speech contemptible, though bold when absent (his letters being boastful, but his bodily presence contemptible). "I beseech you," says the apostle, "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ showing thus the true character of his own meekness and humility when among them], not to compel me to be bold among you, as I think of being with regard to some who pretend that I walk after the flesh." The strength of the war that he waged against evil was founded on spiritual weapons, with which he brought down all that exalted itself against the knowledge of God. This is the principle on which

he acted, to seek to bring to obedience all who hearkened to God, and then severity to all disobedience, when once obedience should be fully established, and those who would hearken were restored to order. Precious principle! the power and the guidance of the Spirit acting in full, and with all patience, to restore to order, and to a walk worthy of God; carrying the remonstrances of grace to the utmost, until all those who would hearken to them and willingly obey God were restored; and then to assert divine authority in judgment and discipline, with the weight which was added to the apostolic action by the conscience and common action of all those who had been brought back to obedience.

Observe, that the apostle refers to his personal authority as an apostle; but that he uses it in patience (for he possessed it for the purpose of edification and not for destruction) in order to bring back to obedience and uprightness all those who would hearken; and thus, preserving christian unity in holiness, he clothes the apostolic authority with the power of the universal conscience of the assembly, guided by the Spirit, so far as there was a conscience at work.

He then declares that such as he is in his letters, such shall they find him when he is present; and he contrasts the conduct of those who took advantage of his labors, beguiling a people who had already become Christians, in order to stir them up against him, with his own conduct in going where Christ had not yet been known, seeking to bring souls to the knowledge of a Savior of whom they were ignorant. Also he hoped that, when he visited the Corinthians, his ministry would be enlarged among them by their increase of faith, in order that he might go on beyond them to evangelise regions that still lay in darkness. But he who gloried, let him glory in the Lord.

In **CHAPTER 11**, jealous with regard to his beloved Corinthians with a godly jealousy, he carries yet further his arguments relating to false teachers. He asks the faithful in Corinth to bear with him a little, while he acts like a fool in speaking of himself. He had espoused them as a chaste virgin to Christ, and he feared lest any should corrupt their minds, leading them away from the simplicity that is in Him. If the Corinthians had received another Christ from the teachers lately come among them, or another Spirit, or another gospel, they might well bear with what these teachers

did. But certainly the apostle had not been a whit behind in his instructions, even if they compared him with the most renowned of the apostles. Had he wronged them by receiving nothing at their hands (as these new teachers boasted of doing), and in taking money from other assemblies, and never being a burden to them? — a subject for boasting, of which no one should deprive him in the regions of Achaia. Had he refused to take anything from them because he loved them not? God knew — No; it was to deprive the false teachers of a means of commending themselves to them by laboring gratuitously among them, while the apostle received money. He would deprive them of this boast, for they were false apostles. As Satan transformed himself into an angel of light, so his instruments made themselves ministers of righteousness. But again let them bear with him while he spoke as a fool in speaking of himself. If these ministers of Satan accredited themselves as Jews, as of the ancient religion of God, consecrated by its antiquity and its traditions, he could do as much, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and possessing all the titles to glory of which they boasted. And if it was a question of christian service — to speak as a fool — certainly the comparison would not fail to show where the devotedness had been. Here in fact God has allowed this invasion of the apostle's work by these wretched judaising men (calling themselves Christians) to be the means of acquainting us with something of the indefatigable labors of the apostle, carried on in a thousand circumstances of which we have no account. In the Acts God has given us the history of the establishment of the assembly in the great principles on which it was founded, and the phases through which it passed on coming out of Judaism. The apostle will have his own reward in the kingdom of glory, not by speaking of it among men. Nevertheless it is profitable for our faith to have some knowledge of christian devotedness, as it was manifested in the life of the apostle. The folly of the Corinthians has been the means of furnishing us with a little glimpse of it.

Troubles and dangers without, incessant anxieties within, a courage that quailed before no peril, a love for poor sinners and for the assembly that nothing chilled — these few lines sketch the picture of a life of such absolute devotedness that it touches the coldest heart; it makes us fee] all our selfishness, and bend the knee before Him who was the living source of the blessed apostle's devotedness, before Him whose glory inspired it.



Nevertheless, though forced to speak of himself, the apostle would glory only in his infirmities. But he is, as it were, outside his natural work. His past life unfolds before his eyes. The Corinthians obliged him to think of things which he had left behind. After having ended his account, and declared that he would glory in his infirmities alone, there was one circumstance that recurred to him. Nothing can be more natural, more simple, than all these communications. Must he glory? It is but unprofitable. He would come to that of which a man — as in the flesh — could not glory. It was the sovereign power of God, in which the man had no part. It was a man in Christ of whom he spoke — such a one had been caught up to the third heaven, to paradise; in the body, or out of the body, he knew not. The body had no part in it. Of such a one he would glory.

That which exalted him on the earth he would put aside. That which took him up to heaven — that which gave him a portion there — that which he was “in Christ” — was his glory, the joy of his heart, the portion in which he readily would glory. Happy being! whose portion in Christ was such that, in thinking of it, he is content to forget all that could exalt him as man; as he says elsewhere as to his hope, “that I may win Christ.” The man, the body, had no share in a power, to taste of which he had to be caught up into heaven; but of such a one he would glory. There, where God and His glory are everything, separated from his body as to any consciousness of being in it, he heard things which men in the body were not capable of entering into, and which it was not fitting that a mortal man should declare, which the mode of being of a man in the body could not admit. These things had made the deepest impression on the apostle; they strengthened him for the ministry; but he could not introduce them into the manner of understanding and communicating which belongs to man’s condition here below.

But many practical lessons are connected with this marvelous favor shown to the apostle. I say, marvelous; for in truth one feels what a ministry must his have been, whose strength, and whose way of seeing and judging, were drawn from such a position. What an extraordinary mission was that of this apostle! But he had it in an earthen vessel. Nothing amends the flesh. Once come back into the consciousness of his human existence on earth, the apostle’s flesh would have taken advantage of the favor he had enjoyed to exalt him in his own eyes, to say, ‘None have been in the third

heaven but thou, Paul.' To be near God in the glory, as out of the body, does not puff up. All is Christ, and Christ is all: self is forgotten. To have been there is another thing. The presence of God makes us feel our nothingness. The flesh can avail itself of our having been in it, when we are no longer there. Alas! what is man? But God is watchful; in His grace He provided for the danger of His poor servant. To have taken him up to a fourth heaven — so to speak — would only have increased the danger. There is no way of amending the flesh; the presence of God silences it. It will boast of it as soon as it is no longer there. To walk safely, it must be held in check, such as it is. We have to reckon it dead; but it often requires to be bridled, that the heart be not drawn away from God by its means, and that it may neither impede our walk nor spoil our testimony. Paul received a thorn in the flesh, lest he should be puffed up on account of the abundant revelations which he had received. We know, by the epistle to the Galatians, that it was something which tended to make him contemptible in his preaching: a very intelligible counterpoise to these remarkable revelations.

God left this task to Satan, as He used him for the humiliation of Job. Whatever graces may be bestowed on us, we must go through the ordinary exercises of personal faith, in which the heart only walks safely when the flesh is bridled, and so practically nullified, that we are not conscious of it as active in us when we wish to be wholly given to God, and to think of Him and with Him according to our measure.

Three times (like the Lord with reference to the cup He was to drink) the apostle asks Him that the thorn may be taken away; but the divine life is fashioned in the putting off of self, and — imperfect as we are — this putting off as to practice that which, as to truth, if we look at our standing in Christ, we have put off, is wrought by our being made conscious of the humiliating unsuitableness of this flesh, which we like to gratify, to the presence of God and the service to which we are called. Happy for us when it is by way of prevention, and not by the humiliation of a fall, as was the case with Peter! The difference is plain. There it was self-confidence mingled with self-will in spite of the Lord's warnings. Here, though still the flesh, the occasion was the revelations which had been made to Paul. If we learn the tendency of the flesh in the presence of God, we come out of it humble, and we escape humiliation. But in general

(and we may say in some respects with all) we have to experience the revelations that lift us up to God, whatever their measure may be, and we have to experience what the vessel is in which it is contained, by the pain it gives us through the sense of what it is — I do not say through falls.

God, in His government, knows how to unite suffering for Christ, and the discipline in the flesh, in the same circumstance; and this explains Hebrews 12:1-11. The apostle preached: if he was despised in his preaching it was truly for the Lord that he suffered; nevertheless the same thing disciplined the flesh, and prevented the apostle priding himself on the revelations he enjoyed, and the consequent power with which he unfolded the truth. In the presence of God, in the third heaven, he truly felt that man was nothing, and Christ everything. He must acquire the practical experience of the same thing below. The flesh must be annulled, where it is not a nullity, by the experimental sense of the evil which is in it, and must thus become consciously a nullity in the personal experience of that which it is. For what was the flesh of Paul — which only hindered him morally in his work, by drawing him away from God — except a troublesome companion in his work? The suppression of the flesh felt and judged was a most profitable exercise of the heart.

Observe here the blessed position of the apostle, as caught up into the third heaven. He could glory in such a one, because self was entirely lost in the things with which he was in relation. He did not merely glory in the things, neither does he say “in myself.” Self was completely lost sight of in the enjoyment of things that were unutterable by the man when he returned into the consciousness of self. He would glory in such a one; but in himself, looked at in flesh, he would not glory, save in his infirmities. On the other hand, is it not humiliating to think that he who had enjoyed such exaltation should have to go through the painful experience of what the flesh is, wicked, despicable, and selfish?

Observe also the difference between Christ and any man whatsoever. Christ could be on the mount in glory with Moses, and be owned as His Son by the Father Himself; and He can be on the plain in the presence of Satan and of the multitude; but, although the scenes are different, He is alike perfect in each. We find admirable affections in the apostles, and especially in Paul; we find works, as Jesus said, greater than His own; we

find exercises of heart, and astonishing heights by grace; in a word we see a marvelous power developed by the Holy Ghost in this extraordinary servant of the Lord; but we do not find the evenness that was in Christ. He was the Son of man who was in heaven. Such as Paul are chords on which God strikes and on which He produces a wondrous music; but Christ is all the music itself.

Finally, observe that the humiliation needed to reduce the rebellious flesh to its nothingness is used by Christ to display His power in it. Thus humbled, we learn our dependence. All that is of us, all that constitutes self, is a hindrance; the infirmity is that in which it is put down, laid low, in which weakness is realised. The power of Christ is perfected in it. It is a general principle; humanly speaking, the cross was weakness. Death is the opposite of the strength of man. Nevertheless it is in it that the strength of Christ revealed itself. In it He accomplished His glorious work of salvation.

It is not sin in the flesh that is the subject here when infirmity is spoken of, but what is contrary to the strength of man. Christ never leant on human strength for a moment; He lived by the Father, who had sent Him. The power of the Holy Ghost alone was displayed in Him. Paul needed to have the flesh reduced to weakness, in order that there might not be in it the motion of sin which was natural to it. When the flesh was reduced to its true nothingness as far as good is concerned, and in a manifest way, then Christ could display His strength in it. That strength had its true character. Remark it well: that is always its character — strength made perfect in infirmity. The blessed apostle could glory in a man in Christ above, enjoying all this beatitude, these marvelous things which shut out self, so much were they above all we are. While enjoying them, he was not conscious of the existence of his body. When he was again conscious of it, that which he had heard could not be translated into those communications which had the body for their instrument, and human ears as the means of intelligence. He gloried in that man in Christ above. Here below he only gloried in Christ Himself, and in that infirmity which gave occasion for the power of Christ to rest on him, and which was the demonstration that this power was that of Christ, that Christ made him the vessel of its manifestation. But this nevertheless was realised by painful experiences. The first was the man in Christ, the second the power of Christ resting on

the man. For the first the man as to flesh is nothing; as to the second it is judged and put downturned to weakness, that we may learn, and Christ's power may be manifested. There is an impulse, an ineffable source of ministry on high. Strength comes in, on the humiliation of man as he is in this world, when the man is reduced to nothingness — his true value in divine things — and Christ unfolds in him that strength which could not associate itself with the strength of man, nor depend on it in any way whatsoever. If the instrument was weak, as they alleged, the power which had wrought must have been — not its power, but that of Christ.

Thus, as at the beginning of the epistle we had the true characteristics of the ministry in connection with the objects that gave it that character, so we have here its practical strength, and the source of that strength, in connection with the vessel in which the testimony was deposited, the way in which this ministry was exercised by bringing a mortal man into connection with the ineffable sources from which it flowed, and with the living, present, active energy of Christ, so that the man should be capable of it, and yet that he should not accomplish it in his own carnal strength — a thing moreover impossible in itself.\*

[\* This chapter is altogether a striking one. We have Christians in the highest and lowest conditions; in the third heaven, and in actual low sin. In the first, a man in Christ (true in position, if not in vision, of us all), the apostle glories, and we are right to glory — that is a man in Christ. As to what he is in himself he has to be brought to utter nothingness. But neither the glorying in the man in Christ, nor his being made nothing of in flesh, is power: the latter is the path to it; but then, being nothing, Christ's power is with him, rests on him, and here he has power in service, the man in Christ his own place — Christ in, or His power on, the man, his strength to serve. So that we have the highest apprehension of the Spirit, the lowest failure in flesh, and the way of power in making nothing of the latter, Christ's power being thereon with us, practical power while in the body. But there will be the sense of weakness, the want of proportion between what we are as to the earthen vessel, and what is ministered and enjoyed. It is not merely what is evil but the earthen vessel in which the treasure is.]

Thus the apostle gloried in his sufferings and his infirmities. He had been obliged to speak as a fool; they who ought themselves to have proclaimed the excellence of his ministry had forced him to do it. It was among them that all the most striking proofs of an apostolic ministry had been given. If in anything they had been behind other churches with regard to proofs of his apostleship, it was in their not having contributed anything to his

maintenance. He was coming again. This proof would still be wanting. He would spend himself for them, as a kind father; even although the more he loved, the less he should be loved. Would they say that he had kept up appearances by taking nothing himself, but that he knew how to indemnify himself by using Titus in order to receive from them? It was no such thing. They well knew that Titus had walked among them in the same spirit as the apostle. Sad work, when one who is above these wretched motives and ways of judging and estimating things, and full of these divine and glorious motives of Christ, is obliged to come down to those which occupy the selfish hearts of the people with whom he has to do — hearts that are on a level with the motives which animate and govern the world that surrounds them! But love must bear all things and must think for others, if one cannot think with them, not they with oneself.

Is it then that the apostle took the Corinthians for judges of his conduct? He spoke before God in Christ; and only feared lest, when he came, he should find many of those who professed the name of Christ like the world of iniquity that surrounded them; and that he should be humbled amongst them, and have to bewail many who had already sinned and had not repented of their misdeeds.

For the third time he was coming. Everything should be proved by the testimony of two or three witnesses; and this time he would not spare. The apostle says, “This is the third time I am coming”; yet he adds, “as if I were present the second time, and being absent now.” This is, because he had been there once, was to have gone there on his way to Macedonia, was coming a second time, but did not on account of the state the Corinthians were in; but this third time he was coming, and he had told them beforehand; and he said beforehand, as if he had gone the second time, although now absent, that if he came again he would not spare.

He then puts an end to the question about his ministry by presenting an idea which ought to confound them utterly. If Christ had not spoken by him, Christ did not dwell in them. If Christ was in them, He must have spoken by the apostle, for he had been the means of their conversion. “Since,” he says, “ye seek a proof that Christ speaketh in me, examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith. Do ye not know yourselves, that Christ dwelleth in you, unless ye be reprobates?” and that they did not at

all think. This was quite upsetting them, and turning their foolish and stupid opposition, their unbecoming contempt of the apostle, to their own confusion. What folly to allow themselves to be led away by a thought which, no doubt, exalted them in their own eyes; but which, by calling in question the apostleship of Paul, necessarily overturned, at the same time, their own Christianity!

From “which to you-ward is not weak” to the end of verse 4 is a parenthesis, referring to the character of his ministry, according to the principles brought forward in the previous chapter: weakness, and that which tended to contempt, on the side of man; power on God’s part: even as Christ was crucified in weakness and was raised again by divine power. If the apostle himself was weak, it was in Christ; and he lived in Him, by the power of God, towards the Corinthians. Whatever might be the case with them, he trusted they should know that he was not reprobate; and he only prayed to God that they should do no evil, not in order that he should not be reprobate (that is, worthless in his ministry, for here he is speaking of ministry), but that they might do good even if he were reprobate. For he could do nothing against the truth, but for the truth. He was not master of the Corinthians for his own interest, but was content to be weak that they might be strong; for what he desired was their perfection. But he wrote, being absent, as he had said, in order that when present he might not be obliged to act with severity, according to the authority which the Lord had given him for edification, and not for destruction.

He had written what his heart, filled and guided by the Holy Ghost, impelled him to say; he had poured it all out; and now, wearied, so to speak, with the effort, he closes the epistle with a few brief sentences: — “Rejoice, be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace.” Happen what might, it was this which he desired for them; and that the God of love and of peace should be with them. He rests in this wish, exhorting them to salute one another with affection, as all the saints, including himself, saluted them; praying that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, might be with them all.

## GALATIANS

The epistle to the Galatians sets before us the great source of the afflictions and conflicts of the apostle in the regions where he had preached the glad tidings; that which was at the same time the principal means employed by the enemy to corrupt the gospel. God, it is true, in His love, has suited the gospel to the wants of man. The enemy brings down that which still bears its name to the level of the haughty will of man and the corruption of the natural heart, turning Christianity into a religion that suits that heart, in place of one that is the expression of the heart of God — an all-holy God — and the revelation of that which He has done in His love to bring us into communion with His holiness. We see, at the same time, the connection between the judaising doctrine — which is the denial of full redemption, and looking for good in flesh and man's will, power in man to work out righteousness in himself for God — in those who hindered the apostle's work, and the attacks that were constantly aimed against his ministry; because that ministry appealed directly to the power of the Holy Ghost and to the immediate authority of a glorified Christ, and set man as ruined, and Judaism which dealt with man, wholly aside. In withstanding the efforts of the judaisers, the apostle necessarily establishes the elementary principles of justification by grace. Traces both of this combat with the spirit of Judaism, by which Satan endeavored to destroy true Christianity, and of the maintenance by the apostle of this liberty, and of the authority of his ministry, are found in a multitude of passages in Corinthians, in Philippians, in Colossians, in Timothy, and historically in the Acts. In Galatians the two subjects are treated in a direct and formal way. But the gospel is consequently reduced to its most simple elements, grace to its most simple expression. But, with regard to the error, the question is but the more decisively settled; the irreconcilable difference between the two principles, Judaism and the gospel, is the more strongly marked.

God allowed this invasion of His assembly in the earliest days of its existence, in order that we might have the answer of divine inspiration to these very principles, when they should be developed in an established



system which would claim submission from the children of God as being the church that He had established and the only ministry that He acknowledged. The immediate source of true ministry, according to the gospel that Paul preached to the Gentiles, the impossibility of uniting the law and that gospel — of binding up together subjection to its ordinances and distinction of days — with the holy and heavenly liberty into which we are brought by a risen Christ, the impossibility, I repeat, of uniting the religion of the flesh with that of the Spirit, are plainly set forth in this epistle.

The apostle begins, at the very outset, with the independence, as to all other men, of the ministry which he exercised, pointing out its true source, from which he received it without the intervention of any intermediate instrument whatsoever: adding, in order to show that the Galatians were forsaking the common faith of the saints, “all the brethren which are with me.” Also, in opening the subject of his epistle, the apostle declares at once, that the doctrine introduced by the judaisers among the Galatians was a different gospel (but which was not really another), not the gospel of Christ.

He begins then by declaring that he is not an apostle either of men or by man. He does not come on the part of men as though sent by them, and it is not by means of any man that he had received his commission, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead. It was by Jesus Christ, on the way to Damascus; and by the Father, it appears to me, when the Holy Ghost said, “Separate to me Barnabas and Paul.” But he speaks thus, in order to carry up the origin of his ministry to the primary source of all real good, and of all legitimate authority.\*

[\* Not “of men” what calls itself the clergy would freely admit, but not “by man” they cannot. It strikes at the root of their existence as such. They boast its descent from man, but (it is remarkable enough) none from Paul, the true minister of the assembly, and, where most insisted on, from Peter, the apostle of the circumcision. Peter was not the apostle to the Gentiles at all, and, as far as we know, never went to them.]

He wishes, as usual, to the assembly, grace and peace from God in His character of Father, and from Jesus in His character of Lord. But he adds here to the name of Jesus, that which belongs to that character of the gospel which the Galatians had lost sight of, namely, that Christ had given

Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this present evil age. The natural man, in his sins, belongs to this age. The Galatians desired to return to it under the pretext of a righteousness according to the law. Christ had given Himself for our sins in order to take us out of it: for the world is judged. Looked at as in the flesh, we are of it. Now the righteousness of the law has to do with men in the flesh. It is man as in the flesh who is to fulfill it, and the flesh has its sphere in this world; the righteousness which man would accomplish in the flesh is directed according to the elements of this world. Legal righteousness, man in the flesh, and the world, go together. Whereas Christ has viewed us as sinners, having no righteousness, and has given Himself for our sins, and to deliver us from this condemned world, in which men seek to establish righteousness by putting themselves on the ground of the flesh which can never accomplish it. This deliverance is also according to the will of our God and Father. He will have a heavenly people, redeemed according to that love which has given us a place on high with Himself, and a life in which the Holy Ghost works, to make us enjoy it and cause us to walk in the liberty and in the holiness which He gives us in this new creation, of which Jesus Himself, risen and glorified, is the head and the glory.

The apostle opens his subject without preamble: he was full of it, and the state of the Galatians who were giving up the gospel in its foundations forced it out from an oppressed, and I may say, an indignant heart. How was it possible that the Galatians had so quickly forsaken him, who had called them according to the power of the grace of Christ, for a different gospel? It was by this call of God that they had part in the glorious liberty, and in the salvation that has its realisation in heaven. It was by the redemption that Christ had accomplished and the grace that belongs to us in Him, that they enjoyed heavenly and christian happiness. And now they were turning to an entirely different testimony; a testimony which was not another gospel, another true glad tidings. It did but trouble their minds by perverting the true gospel. "But," says the apostle, reiterating his words on the subject, "if an angel from heaven, or he Paul himself], preached anything besides the gospel that he had already preached to them, let him be accursed." Observe here, that he will allow nothing in addition to that which he had preached.

They did not formally deny Christ; they wished to add circumcision. But the gospel which the apostle had preached was the complete and whole gospel. Nothing could be added to it without altering it, without saying that it was not the perfect gospel, without really adding something that was of another nature, that is to say, corrupting it. For the entirely heavenly revelation of God was what Paul had taught them. In his teaching he had completed the circle of the doctrine of God. To add anything to it was to deny its perfection; and to alter its character, to corrupt it. The apostle is not speaking of a doctrine openly opposed to it, but of that which is outside the gospel which he had preached. Thus, he says, there cannot be another gospel; it is a different gospel, but there are no glad tidings except that which he had preached. It is but a corruption of the true, a corruption by which they troubled souls. Thus, in love to souls, he could anathematise those who turned them away from the perfect truth that he had preached. It was the gospel of God Himself. Everything else was of Satan. If Paul himself brought another, let him be anathema. The pure and entire gospel was already proclaimed, and it asserted its claims in the name of God against all that pretended to associate itself with it. Did Paul seek to satisfy the minds of men in his gospel, or to please men? In no wise; he would not thus be the servant of Christ.

He then speaks historically of his ministry, and of the question whether man had anything to do with it. His gospel was not according to man, for he had not received it from any man; he had not been taught it. That which he possessed was his by the immediate revelation made to him by Jesus Christ. And when God, who, from his mother's womb, set him apart, and had called him by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in him, the revelation had at once all its own power as such. He did not consult any one. He did not put himself into communication with the other apostles, but at once acted independently of them, as being directly taught of God. It was not till three years after that he went to make acquaintance with Peter, and also saw James. The churches of Judea did not know him by sight; only, they glorified God for the grace he had received. Moreover he was only fifteen days in Jerusalem. He then went into Syria and Cilicia. Fourteen years afterwards he went up to Jerusalem (we have the account in Acts 15) with Barnabas, and took Titus with him. But Titus, Gentile as he was, had not been circumcised; an evident proof of the liberty in which

the apostle publicly stood. It was a bold step on his part to take Titus with him, and thus decide the question between himself and the judaising Christians. He went up because of false brethren, who sought to spy out the liberty into which Paul (enjoying it in the Spirit) introduced believers; and he went up by virtue of a revelation.

We may observe here, how the communications of God may be inwardly the guides of our conduct, although we yield to motives presented by others. In Acts 15 we find the outward history; here, that which governed the apostle's heart. God (in order that the thing might be decided at Jerusalem, to shut every mouth and to maintain unity) did not allow the apostle to have the upper hand at Antioch, or to arrange on the spot the walk of the assembly formed in that place. Neither did He allow him to isolate himself in his own convictions, but made him go up to Jerusalem and communicate to the chief apostles that which he taught, so that there should be community of testimony on this important point; and that they also should acknowledge Paul as taught of God independently of them, and at the same time recognise his ministry as sent of God, and that he was acting on the part of God as much as themselves. For, although God would have him communicate to them that which he had taught others, he received nothing from them. The effect of his communication was, that they owned the grace which God had granted him and the ministry he had received for the Gentiles, and they gave to him and to Barnabas the right hands of fellowship.

Had he gone up earlier, whatever his knowledge might have been, the proofs of his special and independent ministry would not have existed. But he had labored fruitfully for many years without receiving any mission from the other apostles, and they had to recognise his apostleship as the immediate gift of God, as well as the truths which God had imparted to him: the proofs were there; and God had owned this apostleship, as He had given it. The twelve had nothing to do but to acknowledge it, if they acknowledged God as the source of all these excellent gifts. Paul was an apostle from God without their intervention. They could acknowledge his ministry, and in it the God who had give them that which they themselves exercised.

Moreover Paul had always acted independently in the fulfillment of his mission. When Peter came to Antioch, he withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. He was not, as to Paul, as a superior before whom his subordinates must maintain a respectful silence. Although God had wrought mightily in Peter, yet his companion in apostleship (faithful to Him who had called him) could not allow the gospel to be falsified, which had been committed to his own care by the Lord Himself. Ardent as he was, poor Peter always cared too much about the opinion of others. Now the opinion that prevails in the world is always that which influences the heart of man; and this opinion is always one which gives a certain glory to man after the flesh. Paul, taught from above and full of the power of the Spirit, who, by revealing heavenly glory had made him feel that all which exalted the flesh obscured that glory and falsified the gospel that declared it — Paul, who lived and moved morally in the new creation, of which a glorified Christ is the center; and as firm as he was ardent, because he realised the things that are not seen; as clear-sighted as firm, because he lived in the realisation of spiritual and heavenly things in Christ — Paul, for whom to win Christ thus glorified was everything, clearly sees the carnal walk of the apostle of the circumcision. He is not deterred by man; he is occupied with Christ who was his all, and with the truth. He does not spare one who overturned this truth, be his position in the assembly what it might.

It was dissimulation in Peter. While alone, where the influence of heavenly truth prevailed, he ate with the Gentiles, surrounding himself with the reputation of walking in the same liberty as others. But when certain persons came from James, from Jerusalem, where he himself habitually lived, the center where religious flesh and its customs still had (under the patient goodness of God) so much power, he no longer dared to use a liberty which was condemned by those Christians who were still Jewish in their sentiments; he withdrew himself. What a poor thing is man! And we are weak in proportion to our importance before men; when we are nothing, we can do all things, as far as human opinion is concerned. We exercise, at the same time, an unfavorable influence over others in the degree in which they influence us — in which we yield to the influence which the desire of maintaining our reputation among them exercises over our hearts: and all the esteem in which we are held, even justly, becomes a

means of evil.\* Peter, who fears those that came from Jerusalem, draws away all the Jews and even Barnabas with him in his dissimulation.

[\* It is practically important to remark that worldliness or any allowance of what is not of God, by a godly man, gives the weight of his godliness to the evil he allows.]

Paul, energetic and faithful, through grace, alone remains upright: and he rebukes Peter before them all. Why compel Gentiles to live as Jews in order to enjoy full christian communion, when he, being a Jew, had felt himself free to live as the Gentiles? Themselves Jews by nature, and not poor sinners of the Gentiles, they had given up the law as a means of securing the favor of God, and had taken refuge in Christ. But if they sought to rebuild the edifice of legal obligations, in order to acquire righteousness, why had they overturned it? Thus acting, they made themselves transgressors in having overturned it. And more than that; since it was in order to come to Christ — in exchange for the efficacy which they had formerly supposed to exist in the law as a means of justification — that they had ceased to seek righteousness by the law, Christ was a minister of sin. His doctrine had made them transgressors! For in rebuilding the edifice of the law, they made it evident that they ought not to have overthrown it; and it was Christ who made them do so.

What a result from the weakness which, in order to please men, had returned to those things that were gratifying to the flesh! How little did Peter think of this! How little do many Christians suspect it! To rest upon ordinances is to rest upon the flesh; there are none in heaven. When Christ, who is there, is everything, it cannot be done. Christ has indeed established ordinances to distinguish His people from the world, by that which signified, on the one hand, that they were not of it, but dead with Him to it, and, on the other hand, to gather them on the ground of that which alone can unite them all — on the ground of the cross and of accomplished redemption, in the unity of His body. But if, instead of using them with thanksgiving according to His will, we rest upon them, we have forsaken the fullness, the sufficiency, of Christ, to build upon the flesh, which can thus occupy itself with these ordinances, and find in them its fatal sustenance and a veil to hide the perfect Savior, of whose death, as in connection with this world and with man living in the flesh, these ordinances so plainly speak to us. To rest upon christian ordinances is

exactly to deny the precious and solemn truth which they present to us, that there is no longer righteousness after the flesh, since Christ is dead and risen.

This the apostle deeply felt; this he had been called to set before the eyes and consciences of men by the power of the Holy Ghost. How many afflictions, how many conflicts, his task cost him! The flesh of man likes to have some credit; it cannot bear to be treated as vile and incapable of good, to be excluded and condemned to annihilation, not by efforts to annul itself, which would restore it all its importance, but by a work that leaves it in its true nothingness, and that has pronounced the absolute judgment of death upon it, so that, convicted of being nothing but sin, it has only to be silent. If it acts, it is only to do evil. Its place is to be dead, and not better. We have both right and power to hold it as such, because Christ has died, and we live in His risen life. He has Himself become our life. Alive in Him, I treat the flesh as dead; I am not a debtor to it. God has condemned sin in the flesh, in that His Son came in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin. It is this great principle of our being dead with Christ which the apostle sets forth at the end of the chapter (only first recognising the force of the law to bring death into the conscience). He had discovered that to be under a law was to find himself condemned to death. He had undergone in spirit the whole force of this principle; his soul had realised death in all its power. He was dead; but, if so, he was dead to the law. The power of a law does not reach beyond life; and, its victim once dead, it has no more power over him. Now Paul had acknowledged this truth; and, attributing to the principle of law its whole force, he confessed himself to be dead by law — dead then to law. But, how? Was it by undergoing the eternal consequences of its violation; for if the law killed, it condemned too? (see 2 Corinthians 3). By no means. It is quite another thing here. He did not deny the authority of the law, he acknowledged its force in his soul, but in death, in order that he might live to God.

But where could he find this life, since the law only slew him? This he explains. It was not himself in his own responsibility, exposed as he was to the final consequences of the violation of the law — who could find life in it! Christ had been crucified — He who could suffer the curse of the law of God, and death, and yet live in the mighty and holy life which nothing could take away; which made it impossible for death to hold Him, although

in grace He tasted it. But the apostle (whom this same grace had reached) owning it according to the truth as a poor sinner in subjection to death, and blessing the God who granted him the grace of life and of free acceptance in Christ, had been associated with Christ in God's counsels in His death (now realised by faith, and become true practically by Christ, who had died and risen again, being his life). He was crucified with Him, so that the condemnation of it was gone for Paul. It is Christ whom death under the law had reached. The law had reached Saul the sinner, in the Person of Him who had given Himself for him, in fact, and now Saul himself in conscience, and brought death there — but the death of the old man (see Romans 7:9, 10) and it had now no more right over him; for the life to which the dominion of the law was attached had come to its end upon the cross.\* Nevertheless he lived: yet not he, but Christ, in that life in which Christ rose from among the dead — Christ lived in him. Thus the dominion of the law over him disappeared (while ascribing to the law all its force), because that dominion was connected with the life in regard to which he reckoned himself to be dead in Christ, who had really undergone death for this purpose. And Paul lived in that mighty and holy life, in the perfection and energy of which Christ was risen from among the dead, after having born the curse of the law. He lived to God, and held the corrupt life of his flesh as dead. His life drew all its character, all its mode of being, from the source whence it flowed.

[\* Christ had also born his sins; but this is not the subject here spoken of; it is the dominion of the law over him while living on earth.]

But the creature must have an object to live for, and so it was as to Paul's soul, it was by the faith of Jesus Christ. By faith in Jesus Christ Paul lived indeed. The Christ who was the source of his life, who was his life, was its object also. It is this which always characterises the life of Christ in us: He Himself is its object — He alone. The fact, that it is by dying for us in love that He — who was capable of it, the Son of God — has given us thus freed from sin this life as our own, being ever before the mind, in our eyes He is clothed with the love He has thus shown us. We live by faith of the Son of God, who has loved us, and given Himself for us. And here it is personal life, the individual faith that attaches us to Christ, and makes Him precious to us as the object of the soul's intimate faith. Thus the grace of God is not frustrated: for, if righteousness were established on the



principle of law, Christ died in vain, since it would be by keeping the law ourselves that we should, in our own persons, acquire righteousness.

What a loss, dreadful and irreparable, to lose such a Christ, as we, under grace, have known Him; such a righteousness; such a love; the Son of God our portion, our life; the Son of God devoted for us, and to us! It is indeed this which awakens the strong feelings of the apostle: "O foolish Galatians," he continues, "who hath bewitched you?" Christ had been portrayed as crucified before their eyes. Thus their folly appeared still more surprising, in thinking of what they had received, of what in fact they were enjoying under the gospel, and of their sufferings for the sake of that gospel. Had they received the Spirit through works done on the principle of law, or through a testimony received by faith? Having begun by the power of the Spirit, would they carry the thing on to perfection by the wretched flesh? They had suffered for the gospel, for the pure gospel, unadulterated with Judaism and the law: was it then all in vain? Again, he who ministered to them the Spirit, and worked miracles among them, was it through works on the principle of law, or in connection with a testimony received by faith? Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. It was the principle established by God in the case of the father of the faithful. Therefore they who placed themselves by grace on the principle of faith — ,they were the "children of Abraham." And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles through faith, preached this gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In thee shall all nations be blessed."

The epistle is necessarily elementary, for the Galatians were forsaking the foundation, and the apostle insists on that. The great principles of the epistle are, connected with the known presence of the Spirit, promise according to grace in contrast with and before law, Christ the accomplishment of the promise, the law coming in by the bye meanwhile. The Gentiles were thus heirs in Christ, true and sole Heir of promise, and the Jews acquiring the position of sons.

We have then the principle on which Abraham stood before God, and the declaration that it was in him the Gentiles should be blessed. Thus they who are on the principle of faith are blessed with Abraham the believer; while the law pronounced an express curse on those who did not keep it in

every point. This use of Deuteronomy 27 has been considered elsewhere. I would call to mind only that (the twelve tribes having been divided into two companies of six each, the one to announce the blessing and the other the curse) the curses alone are recited, the blessings entirely omitted — a striking circumstance, used by the apostle to show the true character of the law. At the same time the scripture plainly set forth that it was not the works of the law that justified; for it said, “The just shall live on the principle of faith.” Now the law was not on the principle of faith, but he who has done these things shall live by them. But was not this authority of the law to be maintained, as being that of God? Assuredly. But Christ had borne its curse (having redeemed and thus delivered those who — subject before to the sentence of the law — had now believed in Him), in order that the blessing of Abraham might reach the Gentiles through Him, so that all believers, both Jew and Gentile, should receive the Spirit who had been promised.

Christ had exhausted for the believer — who before was subject to the law and guilty of having broken it — all the curse that it pronounced on the guilty: and the law which distinguished Israel had lost its power over the Jew who believed in Jesus, through the very act that bore the most striking testimony to its authority. The barrier therefore no longer existed, and the former promise of blessing could flow freely (according to the terms in which it was made to Abraham) upon the Gentiles through the channel of Christ, who had put away the curse that the law brought upon the Jews; and both Jew and Gentile, believing in Him, could receive the Holy Ghost, the subject of God’s promises, in the time of blessing.

Having thus touched on this point, the apostle now treats, not the effect of the law upon the conscience, but the mutual relationship that existed between the law and the promise. Now the promise had been given first, and not only given, but it had been confirmed; and, had it been but a human covenant solemnly confirmed, it could neither be added to nor annulled. But God had engaged Himself to Abraham by promise 430 years before the law, having deposited, so to say, the blessing of the Gentiles in his person (Genesis 12). This promise was confirmed to his seed\* (Isaac: Genesis 22), and to only one; he does not say to the seeds, but “to the Seed,” and it is Christ who is this Seed. A Jew would not deny this last point. Now the law, coming so long after, could not annul the promise that

was made before and solemnly confirmed by God, so as to render it of no effect. For if the inheritance were on the principle of law, it was no more on that of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise. “Wherefore then the law?” since the unchangeable promise was already given, and the inheritance must come to the object of that promise, the law having no power to change it in any way. It is because there is another question between the soul and God, or, if you will, between God and man, namely, that of righteousness. Grace, which chooses to bestow blessing, and which promises it beforehand, is not the only source of blessing for us. The question of righteousness must be settled with God, the question of sin and of the guilt of man.

[\* We must read, “It is to Abraham that the promise was made, and to his seed”: not, “to Abraham and to his seed.” The promises relating to the temporal blessings of Israel were made to Abraham and to his seed, with the addition that this seed should be as the stars in multitude. But here Paul is not speaking of the promises made to the Jews, but of the blessing granted to the Gentiles. And the promise of blessing for the Gentiles was made to Abraham alone, without mentioning his seed (Genesis 12), and, as the apostle says here, it was confirmed to his seed — without naming Abraham (chap. 22) in the alone person of Isaac, the type of the Lord Jesus offered up in sacrifice and raised from the dead, as Isaac was in a figure. Thus the promise was confirmed, not in Christ, but to Christ the true seed of Abraham. It is on this fact, that the promises were confirmed to Christ, that the whole argument of the apostle depends. The importance of the typical fact, that it is after the figurative sacrifice and resurrection of Isaac that the promise was confirmed to the latter, is evident. Doubtless that which realised this figure secured thus the promise to David; but at the same time the middle wall of partition was broken down, the blessing can flow to the Gentiles — and, let us add, to the Jews also — by virtue of the expiation made by Christ; the believer, made the righteousness of God in Him, can be sealed with the Holy Ghost who had been promised. When once the import of Genesis 12 and 22 has been apprehended, in that which relates to the promises of blessing made to the Gentiles, one sees most clearly the foundation on which the apostle’s argument rests.]

Now the promise which was unconditional and made to Christ, did not raise the question of righteousness. It was necessary that it should be raised, and in the first place by requiring righteousness from man, who was responsible to produce it and to walk in it before God. Man ought to have been righteous before God. But sin had already come in, and it was in reality to make sin manifest that the law was brought in. Sin was indeed present, the will of man was in rebellion against God; but the law drew out the strength of that evil will, and it manifested its thorough contempt of

God by overleaping the barrier which the prohibition of God raised between it and its desires.

The law was added that there might be transgressions, not (as we have seen already, when meditating on the Romans, where this same subject is treated) that there might be sin, but that there might be transgressions, through which the consciences of men might be reached, and the sentence of death and condemnation made to be sensibly felt in their light and careless hearts. The law was therefore introduced between the promise and its fulfillment, in order that the real moral condition of man should be made manifest. Now the circumstances under which it was given rendered it very obvious that the law was in no wise the means of the fulfillment of the promise, but that on the contrary it placed man upon an altogether different ground, which made him know himself, and at the same time made him understand the impossibility of his standing before God on the ground of his own responsibility. God had made an unconditional promise to the seed of Abraham. He will infallibly perform it, for He is God. But in the communication of the law there is nothing immediate and direct from God simply. It is ordained by the hand of angels. It is not God who, in speaking, engages Himself simply by His own word to the person in whose favor the promise is to be fulfilled. The angels of glory, who had no part in the promises (for it was angels who shone in the glory of Sinai; see Psalm 68) invested, by the will of God, the proclamation of the law, with the splendor of their dignity. But the God of the angels and of Israel stood apart, hidden in His sanctuary of clouds and fire and thick darkness. He was encompassed with glory; He made Himself terrible in His magnificence; but He did not display Himself. He had given the promise in person; a mediator brought the law. And the existence of a mediator necessarily supposes two parties. But God was one; and it was the foundation of the whole Jewish religion. There was therefore another on whom the steadfastness of the covenant made at Sinai depended. And in fact Moses went up and down, and carried the words of Jehovah to Israel, and the answer of Israel who engaged themselves to perform that which Jehovah imposed on them as a condition of the enjoyment of the effect of His promise.

“If ye will indeed obey my voice,” said Jehovah. “All that Jehovah hath spoken we will do,” replied Israel intermediately through Moses. What

were the consequences? The apostle, with touching tenderness, as it appears to me, does not answer this question — does not deduce the necessary consequences of his argument. His object was to show the difference between the promise and the law, without needlessly wounding the heart of a people whom he loved. On the contrary, he endeavors at once to prevent any offense that might arise from what he had said; further developing at the same time his thesis. Was the law against the promises of God? By no means. If a law had been given that was to impart life, then righteousness (for that is our subject in this passage) should have been by the law. Man, possessing divine life, would have been righteous in the righteousness that he had accomplished. The law promised the blessing of God on the terms of man's obedience: if it could have given life at the same time, this obedience would have taken place, righteousness would have been accomplished on the ground of law; they to whom the promise had been made would have enjoyed its fulfillment by virtue of their own righteousness. But it was the contrary which happened, for after all man, whether Jew or Gentile, is a sinner by nature; without law, he is the slave of his unbridled passions; under law, he shows their strength by breaking the law. The scripture has shut up all under sin, in order that this promise, by faith in Jesus Christ, should be accomplished in favor of those who believe.

Now before faith came (that is, christian faith, as the principle of relationship with God, before the existence of the positive objects of faith in the Person, the work, and the glory of Christ as man, had become the means of establishing the faith of the gospel), the Jews were kept under the law, shut up with a view to the enjoyment of this privilege which was to come. Thus the law had been to the Jews as a child's conductor up to Christ, in order that they might be justified on the principle of faith. Meanwhile they were not without restraint; they were kept apart from the nations, not less guilty than they, but kept separate for a justification, the necessity of which was made more evident by the law which they did not fulfill, but which demanded righteousness from man; thus showing that God required this righteousness. But when once faith had come, those until then subject to the law were no longer under the tutelage of this law, which only bound them until faith was come. For this faith, placing man immediately in the presence of God, and making the believer a son of the

Father of glory, left no more place for the guidance of the tutor employed during the nonage of one who was now set free and in direct relationship with the Father.

The believer then is a son in immediate connection with his Father, with God (God Himself being manifested). He is a son, because all who have been baptised to have part in the privileges that are in Christ have put on Christ. They are not before God as Jews or Gentiles, bond or free, male or female; they are before God according to their position in Christ, all one thing in Him, Christ being for all the common and only measure of their relationship with God. But this Christ was, as we have seen, the one Seed of Abraham: and if the Gentiles were in Christ, they entered consequently into this privileged position; they were, in Christ, the seed of Abraham, and heirs according to the promise made to that seed.

The relative position therefore of the Jew (even though he were godly) before the coming of Christ, and of the believing Jew or Gentile when Christ had been revealed, is clearly set forth; and in the commencement of chapter 4 the apostle sums up that which he had said. He compares the believer before the coming of Christ to a child under age, who has no direct relation with his father as to his thoughts, but who receives his father's orders, without his accounting for them to him, as a servant would receive them. He is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Thus the Jews, although they were heirs of the promises, were not in connection with the Father and His counsels in Jesus, but were in tutelage to principles that appertained to the system of the present world, which is but a corrupt and fallen creation. Their walk was ordained of God in this system, but did not go beyond it. We speak of the system by which they were guided, whatever divine light they might receive from time to time to reveal heaven to them, to encourage them in hope, while making the system under the rule of which they were placed yet darker. Under the law then, heirs as they were, they were still in bondage. But when the time was fulfilled and ripe for it, God sent forth His Son an act flowing from His sovereign goodness for the accomplishment of His eternal counsels, and for the manifestation of all His character. It was God who did it. It was He who acted. The law required man to act, and it manifested man to be just the contrary of that which he ought to have been according to the law. But the Son of God comes from God. He requires nothing. He is manifested in

the world in relation with men under the double aspect of a man born of woman, and a man under law.

If sin and death came in by the woman, Christ came into this world by the woman also. If through law man is under condemnation, Christ puts Himself under law also. Under this double aspect He takes the place in which man was found; He takes it in grace without sin, but with the responsibility that belonged to it — a responsibility which He alone has met. But still the object of His mission went much farther than the manifestation in His Person of man without sin, in the midst of evil, and having the knowledge of good and evil. He came to redeem those that were under the law, in order that believers (be they who they may) should receive the adoption. Now that the Gentile believers had been admitted to share the adoption was proved by the sending of the Spirit who made them cry, “Abba, Father.” For it is because they are sons, that God sent the Spirit of His Son into their heart, as well as into that of the Jews without distinction. The Gentile, a stranger to the house, and the Jew, who under age differed in nothing from a servant, had each taken the position of a son in direct relation with the Father — a relation of which the Holy Ghost was the power and the witness — in consequence of the redemption wrought in their behalf by the Son; the Jew under the law needing it as much as the Gentile in his sins. But its efficacy was such that the believer was not a bondman but a son, and if a son, an heir also of God by Christ. Previously the Gentiles had been in bondage, not indeed to the law, but to that which, in its nature, was not God. They knew not God, and were the slaves of everything that boasted of the name of God, in order to blind the heart of man alienated from Him who is the true God and from His knowledge.

But what were these Gentiles, become Christians, now doing? They desired to be again in bondage to these wretched elements, worldly and carnal, to which they had formerly been in subjection; these things of which the carnal man could form his religion, without one moral or spiritual thought, and which placed the glory due to God, in outward observances which an unbeliever and a heathen ignorant of God could call his religion and glory in it.

As figures, which God used to bear testimony beforehand to the realities that are in Christ, they had their true value. God knew how to reconcile the employment of these figures, which are profitable to faith, with a religious system that tested man in the flesh, and that served to answer the question, whether, with every kind of help, man was able to stand before God and to serve Him. But to go back to these ordinances made for man in the flesh, now that God had shown man's incapability of becoming righteous before Him — now that the substance of these shadows was come, was to go back to the position of men in the flesh, and to take that standing without any command of God that sanctioned it. It was to go back to the ground of idolatry, that is to say, to a carnal religion, arranged by man without any authority from God, and which in no way brought man into connection with Him. For things done in the flesh had certainly not that effect. "Ye observe days and months and seasons and years." This the heathen did in their human religion. Judaism was a human religion ordained of God, but, by going back to it when the ordinance of God was no longer in force, they did but go back to the paganism out of which they had been called to have part with Christ in heavenly things.

Nothing can be more striking than this statement of what ritualism is after the cross. It is simply heathenism, going back to man's religion, when God is fully revealed: "I fear concerning you," said the apostle, "that I have labored in vain." But they reproached the apostle with not being a faithful Jew according to the law, with freeing himself from its authority. "Be ye then," says he, "as I am; for I am as ye are" (namely, free from the law). Ye have done me no wrong in saying so. Would to God ye were as much so! He then reminds them of his thorn in the flesh. It was some circumstance adapted to make him contemptible in his ministry. Nevertheless they had received him as an angel of God, as Jesus Christ. What was become of that blessedness? Had he become their enemy because he had told them the truth? Zeal was good; but if it had a right thing for its object, they should have persevered in their zeal, and not merely have maintained it while he was with them. These new teachers were very zealous to have the Galatians for their partisans, and to exclude them from the apostle, that they might be attached to themselves. He labored again, as though travailing in birth, in order that Christ should be formed as if anew in their hearts — a touching testimony of the strength of



his christian love. This love was divine in its character; it was not weakened by the disappointment of ingratitude, because its source was outside the attraction of its objects. Moses said, "Have I conceived all this people, that I should carry them in my bosom?" Paul is ready to travail in birth with them a second time.

He does not know what to say. He would like to be present with them, that he might, on seeing them adapt his words to their condition, for they had really forsaken christian ground. Would they then, since they desired to be under the law, hear the law? In it they might see the two systems, in the type of Hagar and Sarah: that of law, gendering to bondage; and that of grace, to liberty; not that only, but the positive exclusion of the child of bondage from the inheritance. The two could not be united; the one shut out the other. The bond-child was born according to the flesh, the free-child according to promise. For the law and the covenant of Sinai were in connection with man in the flesh. The principle of man's relationship with God, according to the law (if such relations had been possible), was that of a relationship formed between man in the flesh and the righteous God. As to man, the law and the ordinances were only bondage. They aimed at bridling the will without its being changed. It is all-important to understand, that man under the law is man in the flesh. When born again, dead and risen again, he is no longer under law, which has only dominion over man in that he is alive here below. Read "Jerusalem which is above is our mother" — not "the mother of us all." It is in contrast with Jerusalem on earth, which in its principle answered to Sinai. And observe that the apostle is not here speaking of the violation of the law, but of its principle. The law itself puts man in a state of bondage. It is imposed on man in the flesh, who is opposed to it. By the very fact that he has self-will, the law and that will are in conflict. Self-will is not obedience.

Verse 27 presents some difficulty to many minds, because it is generally confounded with Hagar and Sarah. But it is a separate consideration, suggested by the idea of Jerusalem above. The verse is a quotation from Isaiah 54, which celebrates the joy and glory of the earthly Jerusalem at the beginning of the millennium. The apostle quotes it to show that Jerusalem had more children during the time of her desolation than when she had a husband. In the millennium Jehovah, the Lord, will be her husband. He had been so before. At present she is desolate, she bears not.

Nevertheless there are more children than previously when she was married. Such were the marvelous ways of God. All Christians are reckoned, when earth takes its course again, as the children of Jerusalem, but of Jerusalem with no husband and desolate, so that the Galatians were not to own it as if God did still. Sarah was not without a husband. Here is a different order of thought. Without a husband and desolate (so that, properly speaking, she has none) Jerusalem has more children now than in the best days of her career, when Jehovah was a husband to her. For, as regards the promise, the gospel came forth from her. The assembly is not of promise. It was a counsel hid in God, of which the promises had never spoken. Its position is a yet higher one; but in this place the apostle's instruction does not rise to that height. But we are also the children of promise, and not of the flesh. Israel after the flesh had no other pretension than to be the children of Abraham after the flesh; we are so only by promise. Now the word of God cast out the child of the bondwoman, born after the flesh, that he might not be heir with the child of promise. As to us, we are the children of promise.

It is in this liberty, the liberty of Christ, alluding to the free woman and Jerusalem above, that they were to stand fast, and not put themselves again under the yoke of the law. If they took that ground they made themselves responsible to keep it personally and wholly, and Christ was of no effect to them. They could not rest upon the work of Christ for righteousness, and then hold themselves responsible to fulfill righteousness themselves according to the law. The two things contradict each other. Hence too it would be no longer grace on which they stood. They forsook grace, in order to satisfy the requirements of the law. This is not the Christian's position.

Here is the Christian's position. He does not seek for righteousness before God as a man who does not possess it; he is the righteousness of God in Christ, and Christ Himself is the measure of that righteousness. The Holy Ghost dwells in him. Faith rests in this righteousness, even as God rests in it, and this faith is sustained by the Holy Ghost, who turns the heart that is established in that righteousness towards the glory that is its recompense — a recompense which Christ enjoys already, so that we know what that righteousness deserves. Christ is in the glory due to righteousness, to the work which He accomplished. We know this

righteousness in virtue of that which He has wrought, because God has owned His work and set Him at His right hand on high. The glory in which He is His just reward, and the proof of that righteousness. The Spirit reveals the glory, and seals to us that righteousness on which faith builds. It is thus that the apostle expresses it: “We, through the Spirit, wait for the hope the hoped-for glory] of righteousness by faith.” To us it is faith, for we have not yet the thing hoped for — the glory due to that righteousness which is ours. Christ possesses it, so that we know what we hope for. It is by the Spirit that we know it, and that we have the assurance of the righteousness which gives us the title to possess it. It is not righteousness we wait for, but, by the Spirit in faith, the hope that belongs to it. It is by faith; for in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working by love. There must be a moral reality.

The apostle’s heart is oppressed at the thought of what they were rejecting, and the mischief this doctrine was doing. It overflows. In the midst of his argument he interrupts himself. “Ye did run well: who has hindered you from obeying the truth?” To be so easily persuaded of this Judaizing doctrine, which was but a fatal error, was not the work of Him who had called them. It was not thus that through grace they had become Christians. A little leaven corrupted the whole.

Nevertheless the apostle regains his confidence by looking higher. By resting on the grace which is in Christ towards His own, he can re-assure himself with regard to the Galatians. He stood in doubt when he thought of them; he had confidence when he thought of Christ, that they would surely not be otherwise minded. Thus delivered from the evil by grace, as in the moral case of the Corinthians, he was ready to punish all disobedience, when all that knew how to obey had been brought fully back to obedience; so here also, every heart that was susceptible of the influence of the truth would be brought back to the power of the truth of Christ; and those who, active in evil, troubled them by false doctrine, those whose will was engaged in propagating error, should bear their burden. It is very beautiful to see the apostle’s uneasiness, when he thinks of them the fruit moreover of his love for them — and the confidence which he regains as soon as he lifts up his heart to the Lord. But his abrupt style, his broken and unconnected words, show how deeply his heart was engaged. The error

that separated the soul from Christ was to him more terrible than the said fruits of practical separation. We do not find the same marks of agitation in the epistle to the Corinthians; here the foundation of everything was in question. In the case of the Galatians the glory of Christ the Savior was at stake, the only thing that could bring a soul into connection with God; and on the other hand it was a systematic work of Satan to overthrow the gospel of Christ as needed for the salvation of men.

Here, interrupting himself, he adds, "And I, if I preach circumcision, why am I persecuted?" It will in fact be seen that the Jews were habitually the instigators of the persecution which the apostle suffered from the Gentiles. The spirit of Judaism, as has been the case in all ages, the religious spirit of the natural man, has been Satan's great instrument in his opposition to the gospel. If Christ would put His sanction on the flesh, the world would come to terms and be as religious as you please, and would value itself upon its devotion. But in that case it would not be the true Christ. Christ came, a witness that the natural man is lost, wicked, and without hope, dead in his trespasses and sins; that redemption is necessary, and a new man. He came in grace, but it was because man was incapable of being restored; and consequently all must be pure grace and emanate from God. If Christ would have to do with the old man, all would be well; but, I repeat, He would no longer be Christ. The world then, the old man, does not endure Him. But there is a conscience, there is a felt need of religion, there is the prestige of an ancient religion held from one's fathers; true perhaps in its original foundations, although perverted. Thus the prince of the world will use carnal religion to excite the flesh, the ready enemy, when once awakened, of the spiritual religion which pronounces sentence upon it.

It is only to add something to Christ. But what? If it is not Christ and the new man, it is the old man, it is sinful man; and, instead of a needed and accomplished redemption, and an entirely new life from above, you have a testimony that agreement between the two is possible; that grace is not necessary, except at most as a little help; that man is not already lost and dead in his trespasses and sins, that the flesh is not essentially and absolutely evil. Thus the name of Christ is made subservient to the flesh, which willingly adorns itself with the credit of His name, in order to destroy the gospel from its very foundations. Only preach circumcision,

accept the religion of the flesh, and all difficulty will cease; the world will accept your gospel, but it will not be the gospel of Christ. The cross in itself (that is, the total ruin of man — man proved to be the enemy of God), and perfect finished redemption by grace, will always be a stumbling-block to one who desires to maintain some credit for the flesh. “Would to God,” says the apostle — for he sees the whole gospel falling into ruin before this device, and souls destroyed — ”would to God that they who trouble you were cut off!” What have we seen since then? Where is the holy indignation of the apostle?

He then touches on the point of the practical consequences of this doctrine, and explains how the doctrine of perfect grace was connected, without the law, with a walk worthy of the people of God. Ye have then been called, he says, unto liberty: only use not your liberty for an occasion to the flesh — which the flesh would readily do. God gave the law to convince of sin; the flesh would use it to work out righteousness. He acts in grace, that we may be above sin and outside its dominion: the flesh would use grace as an occasion to sin without restraint. The Christian, truly free from the yoke of sin, as well as from its condemnation (for Christ risen is his life as well as his righteousness, and the Spirit is the power and guide of his walk towards glory, and according to Christ), instead of serving his lusts, seeks to serve others, as free to do it in love. Thus the law itself is fulfilled, without our being under its yoke: for the whole practical law is summed up in this word: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

If, yielding to the flesh, and attacking those who were not circumcised, they devoured one another, they were to take heed that they were not consumed one of another. But the apostle would give something more positive. “This I say then,” he continues, after the interruption of his subject, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” It is not by putting oneself under the law that one has power against sin. It is the Spirit (given in virtue of the ascension of Christ our righteousness, to the right hand of God) who is the Christian’s strength. Now the two powers, the flesh and the Spirit, are antagonistic. The flesh strives to hinder us when we would walk according to the Spirit, and the Spirit resists the working of the flesh to prevent it from accomplishing its will.\* But if we are led of the Spirit, we are not under the law. Holiness, true

holiness, is accomplished without the law, even as righteousness is not founded on it. 'Nor is there any difficulty in judging between what is of the flesh and what is of the Spirit; the apostle enumerates the sad fruits of the former, adding the sure testimony that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. The fruits of the Spirit are equally evident in their character, and assuredly against such things there was no law. If we walk according to the Spirit, the law will find nothing to condemn in us. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh and its lusts. This is what they are, inasmuch as they are Christians; it is that which distinguishes them. If these Galatians really lived, it was in the Spirit: let them then walk in the Spirit.

[\* It is not "so that ye cannot," but "in order that ye might not."

Here is the answer to those who then sought, and now seek, to bring in law for sanctification and as a guide: the strength and the rule for holiness are in the Spirit. The law does not give the Spirit. Moreover (for it is evident that these pretensions of observing the law had given liberty to the pride of the flesh) the Christian was not to be desirous of vain-glory, provoking one another, envying one another. If any one, through carelessness, committed some fault, the Christian's part was to restore this member of Christ, dear to Christ and to the Christian, according to the love of Christ, in a spirit of meekness, remembering that he himself might fall. If they wished for a law, here was one: to bear each other's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (that is, the rule of all His own life here below). It is not by boasting, when one is nothing, that true glory was acquired. It is but deceiving oneself, says the apostle, in language which, by its simplicity, pours unspeakable contempt on those who did so. These legalists boasted much of themselves, imposed burdens on others; and investing themselves with their Judaic glory — that which was a burden to others, and one which they did not help them to bear, was vain-glory to themselves — they gloried in their Judaism, and in making others subject to it. But what was their work? Had they labored really for the Lord? In no wise. Let them prove their own work; then they would have reason to glory in what they had done themselves, if there was any christian work of which they had been the instruments. It certainly would not be in what they were doing then, for it was another who had done the work of Christ in Galatia. And after all, every one should bear his own burden.

The apostle adds a few practical words. He who was taught should, in temporal things, succor those who taught him. Furthermore, although grace was perfect and redemption complete, so that the believer received the Holy Ghost as a seal thereof, God had attached infallible consequences to a man's walk, be it after the flesh or after the Spirit. The effects followed the cause; and they could not mock God by making a profession of grace or Christianity, if they did not walk according to its spirit, as led, in a word, by the Holy Ghost, who is its practical power. Of the flesh they would reap corruption; of the Spirit, life everlasting. But, as Christians, they must have patience in order to reap, and not grow weary of well-doing: the harvest was sure. Let believers, then, do good to all, especially to those of the house of God.

Paul had written this letter with his own hand — an unusual thing for him. He generally employed others (as Tertius for the epistle to the Romans), dictating to them that which he wished to say, adding the benediction with his own hand, as certifying the correctness of that which was written (1 Corinthians 16:21; 2 Thessalonians 3:17): a remarkable proof of the importance that the apostle attached to his writings, and that he did not send them forth as ordinary letters from man to man, but as being furnished with an authority that required the use of such precautions. They were carefully invested with the apostolic authority. In this case, full of sorrow, and feeling that the foundations had been overthrown, he wrote the whole with his own hand. Accordingly, in saying this, he returns immediately to the subject which had caused him to do so.

Those who desired to make a fair show after the flesh constrained the Gentiles to be circumcised, in order to avoid the persecution that attached to the doctrine of the cross — to free salvation by Christ. The circumcised were Jews, of a religion known and received even in this world; but to become the disciples of a crucified man, a man who had been hung as a malefactor, and to confess Him as the only Savior — how could the world be expected to receive it? But the reproach of the cross was the life of Christianity; the world was judged, it was dead in its sin; the prince of the world was judged, he had only the empire of death, he was (with his followers) the impotent enemy of God. In the presence of such a judgment, Judaism was honorable wisdom in the eyes of the world. Satan would make himself a partisan of the doctrine of one only God; and those

who believed in it join themselves to their former adversaries, the worshippers of devils, in order to withstand this new enemy who cast reproach on the whole of fallen humanity, denouncing them as rebels against God, and as devoid of the life which was manifested in Jesus only. The cross was the sentence of death upon nature; and the Jew in the flesh was offended at it, even more than the Gentile, because he lost the glory with which he had been invested before others on account of his knowledge of the only true God.

The carnal heart did not like to suffer, and to lose the good opinion of the world, in which a certain measure of light was accepted or tolerated by people of sense (and by sincere persons when there was no greater light to be had), provided they did not set up pretensions that condemned everybody, and judged everything which the flesh desired and relied on for its importance. A compromise which more or less accepts the flesh — which does not judge it as dead and lost, which, in however small a degree, will acknowledge that the world and the flesh are its basis — the world will accept. It cannot hope to strive against the truth that judges the whole conscience, and it will accept a religion that tolerates its spirit and adapts itself to the flesh, which it desires to spare even when painful sacrifices must be made; provided only that the flesh itself be not entirely set aside. Man will make himself a fakeer — sacrifice his life — provided that it is self that does it, and that God shall not have done the whole in grace, condemning the flesh as incapable of well doing, having nothing good in itself.

The circumcised did not observe the law — that would have been too wearisome, but they desired to glory in proselytes to their religion. In the world the apostle has seen nothing but vanity and sin and death; the spirit of the world, of the carnal man, was morally degraded, corrupt, and guilty, boasting in self, because ignorant of God. Elsewhere he had seen grace, love, purity, obedience, devotedness to the Father's glory and to the happiness of poor sinners. The cross declared the two things: it told what man was; it told what God was, and what holiness and love were. But it was the utmost degradation in the eyes of the world, and put down all its pride. It was another who had accomplished it at the cost of His own life, bearing all possible sufferings; so that the apostle could give free course to all the affections of his heart without boasting himself of anything; on the



contrary, forgetting himself. It is not self that we glory in when we look at the cross of Christ: one is stript of self. It was He who hung upon that cross who was great in Paul's eyes. The world which had crucified Him was thus seen by the apostle in its true character; the Christ who had suffered on the cross in His likewise. In that cross would the apostle glory, happy, by this means to be dead to the world, and to have the world ended, crucified, put to shame, as it deserved to be, for his heart. Faith in the crucified Son of God overcomes the world.

To the believer the world has its true character; for, in fact, in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value (all that has passed away with a dead Christ), but a new creature, according to which we estimate everything as God estimates it. It is to such, the true children of God, that the apostle wishes peace. It was not Israel circumcised after the flesh that was the Israel of God. If there were any of that people who were circumcised in heart, who gloried in the cross according to the sentiments of the new creature, those were the Israel of God. Moreover every true Christian was of them according to the spirit of his walk.

Finally, let no one trouble him with regard to his ministry. He bore the stigmata of the Lord. It is known that marks were printed on a slave with a hot iron to indicate the person to whom he belonged. The wounds which the apostle had received, fully showed who was his Master. Let his right then to call himself the servant of Christ be no more questioned. Touching appeal from one whose heart was wounded at finding his service to the Master whom he had loved called in question! Moreover, Satan, who imprinted those marks, ought indeed to recognise them — those beautiful initials of Jesus.

The apostle desires that grace be with them (according to the divine love that animated him) as souls dear to Christ, whatever their state might be. But there is no outpouring of heart in greetings affectionately addressed to Christians. It was a duty — a duty of love — which he fulfilled; but for the rest, what bonds of affection could he have with persons who sought their glory in the flesh, and who accepted that which dishonored Jesus and which weakened and even annulled the glory of His cross? Without any wish of his, the current of affection was checked. The heart turned to the

dishonored Christ, although loving those that were His in Him. This is the real feeling contained in the last verses of this epistle.

In Galatians we have indeed Christ living in us, in contrast with the flesh, or I still living in flesh. But, as systematic truth, we have neither the believer in Christ nor Christ in the believer. We have the Christian's practical state at the end of chapter 2. Otherwise the whole epistle is a judgment of all return to Judaism, as identical with heathen idolatry. The law and man in the flesh were correlative; law came in between the promise and Christ, the Seed; was a most useful testing of man, but when really known putting him to death, and condemning him. Now this was fully met in grace in the cross, the end in death of man in flesh, of sin, in Christ made sin. All return to law was giving up both promise and the work of grace in Christ, and going back again to flesh proved to be sin and lost, as if there could be relationship with God in it, denying grace, and denying even the true effect of law, and denying man's estate proved in the cross. It was heathenism. And days and years, etc., took man up as alive in flesh, was not the end of the old man in the cross in grace. We have Christ as our life thereupon, or death would leave us of course hopeless. But we have not the christian condition, we in Christ and Christ in us. It is the discussion of the work that brings us there, and where man is, and of vital importance in this respect. Man in the flesh is wholly gone from all relationship with God, and none can be formed: there must be a new creation.

## EPHESIANS

The epistle to the Ephesians gives us the richest exposition of the blessings of the saints individually, and of the assembly, setting forth at the same time the counsels of God with regard to the glory of Christ. Christ Himself is viewed as the One who is to hold all things united in one under His hand, as Head of the assembly. We see the assembly placed in the most intimate relationship with Him, as those who compose it are with the Father Himself, and in the heavenly position dispensed to her by the sovereign grace of God. Now these ways of grace to her reveal God Himself, and in two distinct characters; as well in connection with Christ as with Christians. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the God of Christ, when Christ is looked at as man; the Father of Christ when Christ is looked at as the Son of His love. In the first character the nature of God is revealed; in the second, we see the intimate relationship which we enjoy to Him who bears this character of Father, and that according to the excellence of Christ's own relationship to Him. It is this relationship to the Father, as well as that in which we stand to Christ as His body and His bride, that is the source of blessing to the saints and to the assembly of God, of which grace has made us members as a whole.

The form even of the epistle shows how much the apostle's mind was filled with the sense of the blessing that belongs to the assembly. After having wished grace and peace to the saints and the faithful\* at Ephesus from God, the Father of true Christians, and from Jesus Christ their Lord, he begins at once to speak of the blessings in which all the members of Christ participate. His heart was full of the immensity of grace; and nothing in the state of the Ephesian Christians required any particular remarks adapted to that state. It is nearness of heart to God that produces simplicity, and that enables us in simplicity to enjoy the blessings of God as God Himself bestows them, as they flow from His heart, in all their own excellence — to enjoy them in connection with Him who imparts them, and not merely in a mode adapted to the state of those to whom they are imparted; or through a communication that only reveals a part of these blessings, because the soul would not be able to receive more. Yes,

when near to God, we are in simplicity, and the whole extent of His grace and of our blessings unfolds itself as it is found in Him.

[\* The word translated “faithful” might be rendered “believers.” It is used as a term of superscription both here and in the epistle to the Colossians. We must remember that the apostle was now in prison, and that Christianity had been established for some years, and was exposed to all kinds of attack. To say that one was a believer as at the beginning, was to say that he was faithful. The word then does not merely express that they believed, nor that each individual walked faithfully, but that the apostle addressed himself to those who by grace faithfully maintained the faith they had received.]

It is important to remark two things here in passing: first, that moral nearness to God, and communion with Him, is the only means of any true enlargement in the knowledge of His ways and of the blessings which He imparts to His children, because it is the only position in which we can perceive them, or be morally capable of so doing; and, also, that all conduct which is not suitable to this nearness to God, all levity of thought, which His presence does not admit of, makes us lose these communications from Him and renders us incapable of receiving them. (Compare John 14:21-23). Secondly, it is not that the Lord forsakes us on account of these faults or this carelessness; He intercedes for us, and we experience His grace, but it is no longer communion or intelligent progress in the riches of the revelation of Himself, of the fullness which is in Christ. It is grace adapted to our wants, an answer to our misery. Jesus stretches out His hand to us according to the need that we feel — need produced in our hearts by the operation of the Holy Ghost. This is infinitely precious grace, a sweet experience of His faithfulness and love: we learn by this means to discern good and evil by judging self; but the grace had to be adapted to our wants, and to receive a character according to those wants, as an answer made to them; we have had to think of ourselves.

In a case like this the Holy Ghost occupies us with ourselves (in grace, no doubt), and when we have lost communion with God, we cannot neglect this turning back upon ourselves without deceiving and hardening ourselves. Alas! the dealings of many souls with Christ hardly go beyond this character. It is with all too often the case. In a word, when this happens the thought of sin having been admitted into the heart, our dealings with the Lord to be true must be on the ground of this sad admission of sin (in thought, at least). It is grace alone which allows us

again to have to do with God. The fact that He restores us enhances His grace in our eyes; but this is not communion. When we walk with God, when we walk after the Spirit without grieving Him, He maintains us in communion, in the enjoyment of God, the positive source of joy — of an everlasting joy. This is a position in which He can occupy us — as being ourselves interested in all that interests Him — with all the development of His counsels, His glory, and His goodness, in the Person of Jesus the Christ, Jesus the Son of His love; and the heart is enlarged in the measure of the objects that occupy it. This is our normal condition. This, in the main, was the case with the Ephesians

We have already remarked, that Paul was specially gifted of God to communicate His counsels and His ways in Christ; as John was gifted to reveal His character and life as it was manifested in Jesus. The result of this particular gift in our apostle is naturally found in the epistle we are considering. Nevertheless we, as being ourselves in Christ, find in it a remarkable development of our relationships with God, of the intimacy of those relationships, and of the effect of that intimacy. Christ is the foundation on which our blessings are built. It is as being in Him that we enjoy them. We thus become the actual and present object of the favor of God the Father, even as Christ Himself is its object. The Father has given us to Him; Christ has died for us, has redeemed, washed, and quickened us, and presents us, according to the efficacy of His work, and according to the acceptance of His Person, before God His Father. The secret of all the assembly's blessing is, that it is blessed with Jesus Himself; and thus — like Him, viewed as a man — is accepted before God; for the assembly is His body, and enjoys in Him and by Him all that His Father has bestowed on Him. Individually the Christian is loved as Christ on earth was loved; he will hereafter share in the glory of Christ before the eyes of the world, as a proof that he was so loved, in connection with the name of Father, which God maintains in regard to this (see John 17:23-26). Hence in general we have in this epistle the believer in Christ, not Christ in the believer, though that of course be true. It leads up to the privileges of the believer and of the assembly, more than to the fullness of Christ Himself, and we find more the contrast of this new position with what we were as of the world than development of the life of Christ: this is more largely found in Colossians, which looks more at Christ in us. But this epistle,

setting us in Christ's relationship with God and the Father, and sitting in heavenly places, gives the highest character of our testimony here.

Now Christ stands in two relationships with God, His Father. He is a perfect man before His God; He is a Son with His Father. We are to share both these relationships. This He announced to His disciples ere He went back to heaven: it is unfolded in all its extent by the words He spoke, "I go to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." This precious — this inappreciable truth is the foundation of the apostle's teaching in this place. He considered God in this double aspect, as the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and our blessings are in connection with these two titles.

But before attempting to set forth in detail the apostle's thought, let us remark that he begins here entirely with God, His thoughts and His counsels, not with what man is. We may lay hold of the truth, so to speak, by one or the other of two ends — by that of the sinner's condition in connection with man's responsibility, or by that of the thoughts and eternal counsels of God in view of His own glory. The latter is that side of the truth on which the Spirit here makes us look. Even redemption, all glorious as it is in itself, is consigned to the second place, as the means by which we enjoy the effect of Gods counsels.

It was necessary that the ways of God should be considered on this side, that is, His own thoughts, not merely the means of bringing man into the enjoyment of the fruit of them. It is the epistle to the Ephesians which thus presents them to us; as that to the Romans, after saying it is God's goodness, begins with man's end, demonstrating the evil and presenting grace as meeting and delivering from it.

The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ, having chosen us in Him. Chapter 1 unfolds (v. 4-7) these blessings, and the means of sharing them; verses 8-10, the settled purpose of God for the glory of Christ, in whom we possess them. Next, verses 11-14 set before us the inheritance, and the Holy Ghost given as a seal to our persons, and as the earnest of our inheritance. Then follows a prayer, in which the apostle asks that his dear children in the faith — let us say that we — may know our privileges and the power that has brought us into them, the same as that by which

Christ was raised from the dead and set at the right hand of God to possess them, as the Head of the assembly, which is His body, which, with Him, shall be established over all things that were created by its Head as God and that He inherits as man, filling all things with His divine and redeeming glory. In a word, we have first the calling of God, what the saints are before Him in Christ; then, having stated the full purpose of God as to Christ, God's inheritance in the saints; then the prayer that we may know these two things, and the power by which we are brought into them, and the enjoyment of them.

But we must examine these things more closely. We have seen the establishment of the two relationships between man and God — relationships in which Christ Himself stands. He ascended to His God and our God, to His Father and our Father. We share all the blessings that flow from these two relationships. He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings; not one is lacking. And they are of the highest order; they are not temporal, as was the case with the Jews. It is in the most exalted capacity of the renewed man that we enjoy these blessings: and they are adapted to that capacity, they are spiritual. They are also in the highest sphere: it is not in Canaan or Emmanuel's land. These blessings are granted us in the heavenly places; they are granted us in the most excellent way — one which leaves room for no comparison — it is in Christ. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. But this flows from the heart of God Himself, from a thought outside the circumstances in which He finds us in time. Before the world was, this was our place in His heart. He purposed to give us a place in Christ. He chose us in Him.

What blessing, what a source of joy, what grace, to be thus the objects of God's favor, according to His sovereign love! If we would measure it, it is by Christ we must attempt to do so; or, at least, it is thus that we must feel what this love is. Take especial notice here of the way in which the Holy Ghost keeps it continually before our eyes, that all is in Christ — in the heavenly places in Christ — He had chosen us in Him — unto the adoption by Jesus Christ — made acceptable in the Beloved. This is one of the fundamental principles of the Spirit's instruction in this place. The other is that the blessing has its origin in God Himself. He is its source and author. His own heart, if we may so express it, His own mind, are its

origin and its measure. Therefore it is in Christ alone that we can have any measure of that which cannot be measured. For He is, completely and adequately, the delight of God. The heart of God finds in Him a sufficient object on which to pour itself out entirely, towards which His infinite love can all be exercised.

The blessing then is of God; but moreover it is with Himself and before Him, to gratify Himself, to satisfy His love. It is He who has chosen us, He who has predestined us, He who has blessed us; but it is that we should be before Him, and adopted as sons unto Himself. Such is grace in these great foundations. This consequently is what grace was pleased to do for us.

But there is another thing we have to note here. We are chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. Now this expression is not simply that of the sovereignty of God. If God chose some out of men now, it would be as sovereign as if before the world: but this shows that we belong in the counsels of God to a system set up by Him in Christ before the world existed, which is not of the world when it does exist, and exists after the fashion of this world has passed away. This is a very important aspect of the christian system. Responsibility came in (for man of course) with the creation of Adam in this world. Our place was given us in Christ before the world existed. The development of all the characters of this responsibility went on up to the cross and there closed; innocent, a sinner without law, under law, and, when every way guilty, grace — God Himself comes into the world of sinners in goodness and finds hatred for His love. The world stood judged and men lost, and this the individual now learns as to himself. But then redemption was accomplished, and the full purpose and counsel of God in the new creation in Christ risen, the last Adam, was brought out, “the mystery hidden from ages and generations,” while the first man’s responsibility was being tested. Compare 2 Timothy 1:9-11; Titus 1:2, where this truth is very distinctly brought out.

This responsibility and grace cannot be reconciled really but in Christ. The two principles were in the two trees of the garden; then promise to Abraham unconditionally, that we might understand blessing was free grace; then the law again brought both forward, but put life consequent on responsibility. Christ came, is life, took on Himself for all who believe in



Him the consequence of responsibility, and became, as the divine Son and withal as risen Head, the source of life, our sin being put away; and here, as risen with Him, we not only have received life, but are in a new position quickened out of death with Him, and have a portion according to the counsels which established all in Him before the world existed, and are established according to righteousness and redemption, as a new creation, of which the Second Man is the head. The following chapter will explain our being brought into this place.

We have said that God reveals Himself in two characters, even in His relationship to Christ; He is God, and He is Father. And our blessings are connected with this; that is, with His perfect nature as God, and with the intimacy of positive relationship with Him as Father. The apostle does not yet touch on the inheritance, nor on the counsels of God, with regard to the glory of which Christ is to be the center as a whole; but he speaks of our relationship with God, of that which we are with God and before Him, and not of our inheritance — of that which He has made us to be, and not of that which He has given us. In verses 4-6 our own portion in Christ before God is developed. Verse 4 depends on the name of God; verse 5, on that of Father.

The character of God Himself is depicted in that which is ascribed to the saints (v. 4). God could find His moral delight only in Himself and in that which morally resembles Him. Indeed this is a universal principle. An honest man can find no satisfaction in a man who does not resemble him in this respect. With still greater reason God could not endure that which is in opposition to His holiness, since, in the activity of His nature, He must surround Himself with that which He loves and delights in. But, before all, Christ is this in Himself. He is personally the image of the invisible God. Love, holiness, blameless perfection in all His ways, are united in Him. And God has chosen us in Him. In verse 4 we find our position in this respect. First, we are before Him: He brings us into His presence. The love of God must do this in order to satisfy itself. The love which is in us also must be found in this position to have its perfect object. It is there only that perfect happiness can be found. But this being so, it is needful that we should be like God. He could not bring us into His presence in order to take delight in us, and yet admit us there such as He could not find pleasure in. He has therefore chosen us in Christ, that we should be holy,

without blame before Him in love. He Himself is holy in His character, unblamable in all His ways, love in His nature. It is a position of perfect happiness — in the presence of God, like God; and that, in Christ, the object and the measure of divine affection. So God takes delight in us; and we, possessing a nature like His own as to its moral qualities, are capable of enjoying this nature fully and without hindrance, and of enjoying it in its perfection in Him. It is also His own choice, His own affection, which has placed us there, and which has placed us there in Him, who, being His eternal delight, is worthy of it; so that the heart finds its rest in this position, for there is agreement in our nature with that of God, and we were also chosen to it, which shows the personal affection that God has for us. There is also a perfect and supreme object with which we are occupied.

Remark here that, in the relationship of which we here speak, the blessing is in connection with the nature of God; therefore it is not said that we are predestined to this according to the good pleasure of His will. We are chosen in Christ to be blessed in His presence; it is His infinite grace; but the joy of His nature could not (nor could ours in Him) be other than it is, because such is His nature. Happiness could not be found elsewhere or with another.

But in verse 5 we come to particular privileges, and we are predestined to those privileges. “He has predestined us unto the adoption, according to the good pleasure of his will.” This verse sets before us, not the nature of God, but the intimacy, as we have said, of a positive relationship. Hence it is according to the good pleasure of His will. He may have angels before Him as servants; it was His will to have sons.

Perhaps it might be said that, if admitted to take delight in the nature of God, one could hardly not be in an intimate relationship; but the form, the character of this relationship depends certainly on the sovereign will of God. Moreover, since we possess these things in Christ, the reflection of this divine nature and the relationship of son go together, for the two are united in us. Still, we must remember that our participation in these things depends on the sovereign will of God our Father; even as the means of sharing them, and the manner in which we share them, is that we are in Christ. God our Father, in His sovereign goodness, according to His

counsels of love, chooses to have us near Himself. This purpose, which links us to Christ in grace, is strongly expressed in this verse, as well as that which precedes it. It is not only our position which it characterises, but the Father introduces Himself in a peculiar way with regard to this relationship. The Holy Ghost is not satisfied with saying “He has predestined us unto the adoption,” but He adds “unto himself.” One might say this is implied in the word “adoption.” But the Spirit would particularise this thought to our hearts, that the Father chooses to have us in an intimate relationship with Himself as sons. We are sons to Himself by Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of His will. If Christ is the image of the invisible God, we bear that image, being chosen in Him. If Christ is a Son, we enter into that relationship.

These then are our relationships, so precious, so marvelous, with God our Father in Christ. These are the counsels of God. We find nothing yet of the previous condition of those who were to be called into this blessing. It is a heavenly people, a heavenly family, according to the purposes and counsels of God, the fruit of His eternal thoughts, and of His nature of love — that which is here called the “glory of his grace.” We cannot glorify God by adding anything to Him. He glorifies Himself when He reveals Himself. All this is therefore to the praise of the glory of His grace, according to which He has acted towards us in grace in Christ; according to which Christ is the measure of this grace, its form towards us, He in whom we share it. All the fullness of this grace reveals itself in His ways towards us — the original thoughts, so to speak, of God, which have no other source than Himself, and in and by which He reveals Himself, and by the accomplishment of which He glorifies Himself. And observe here, that the Spirit does not say “the Christ,” at the end of verse 6. When He speaks of Him, He would put emphasis on the thoughts of God. He has acted towards us in grace in the Beloved — in Him who is peculiarly the object of His affections. He brings this characteristic of Christ out into relief when He speaks of the grace bestowed upon us in Him. Was there an especial object of the love, of the affection of God? He has blessed us in that object.

And where is it that He found us when He would bring us into this glorious position? Who is it that He chooses to bless in this way? Poor

sinner, dead in their trespasses and sins, the slaves of Satan and of the flesh.

If it is in Christ that we see our position according to the counsels of God, it is in Him also that we find the redemption that set us in it. We have redemption through His blood, the remission of our sins. Those whom He would bless were poor and miserable through sin. He has acted towards them according to the riches of His grace. We have already observed, that the Spirit brings out in this passage the eternal counsels of God with regard to the saints in Christ, before He enters on the subject of the state from which He drew them, when He found them in their condition of sinners here below. Now the whole mind of God respecting them is revealed in His counsels, in which He glorifies Himself. Therefore it is said, that that which He saw good to do with the saints was according to the glory of His grace. He makes Himself known in it. That which He has done for poor sinners is according to the riches of His grace. In His counsels He has revealed Himself; He is glorious in grace. In His work He thinks of our misery, of our wants, according to the riches of His grace: we share in them, as being their object in our poverty, in our need. He is rich in grace. Thus our position is ordered and established according to the counsels of God, and by the efficacy of His work in Christ — our position, that is, in reference to Him. If we are to think here, where God's thoughts and counsels are revealed, if remission and redemption come of this, we are to think not according to our need as its measure, but according to the riches of God's grace.

But there is more: God having placed us in this intimacy, reveals to us His thoughts respecting the glory of Christ Himself. This same grace has made us the depositaries of the settled purpose of His counsels, with regard to the universal glory of Christ, for the administration of the fullness of times. This is an immense favor granted us. We are interested in the glory of Christ as well as blessed in Him. Our nearness to God and our perfectness before Him enable us to be interested in the counsels of God as to the purposed glory of His Son. And this leads to the inheritance (compare John 14:28). Thus Abraham, though on lower ground, was the friend of God. God our Father has given us to enjoy all blessings in heavenly places ourselves; but He would unite all things in heaven and on the earth under Christ as Head, and our relationship with all that is put

under Him, as well as our relationship with God His Father, depends on our position in Him; it is in Him that we have our inheritance.

The good pleasure of God was to unite all that is created under the hand of Christ. This is His purpose for the administration of the times in which the result of all His ways shall be manifested.\* In Christ we inherit our part, heirs of God, as it is said elsewhere, joint-heirs of Christ. Here however the Spirit sets before us the position, in virtue of which the inheritance has fallen to us, rather than the inheritance itself. He ascribes it also to the sovereign will of God, as He did before with regard to the special relationship of sons unto God. Remark also here, that in the inheritance we shall be to the praise of His glory; as in our relationship to Him we are to the praise of the glory of His grace. Manifested in possession of the inheritance, we shall be the display of His glory made visible and seen in us; but our relationships with Him are the fruit, for our own souls, with Him and before Him, of the infinite grace that has placed us in these relationships and made us capable of them.

[\* It will be a grand spectacle, as the result of the ways of God, to see all things united in perfect peace and union under the authority of man, of the second Adam, the Son of God; ourselves associated with Him in the same glory with Himself, His companions in the heavenly glory, as the objects of the eternal counsels of God. I do not enlarge here upon this scene, because the chapter we are considering directs our attention to the communications of the counsels of God respecting it, and not to the scene itself. The eternal state, in which God is all in all, is again another thing. The administration of the fullness of times is the result of the ways of God in government; the eternal state, that of the perfection of His nature. We, even in the government, are brought in as sons according to His nature. Wonderful privilege!

Such then, with regard to the glory bestowed on Him as man, are the counsels of God our Father with respect to Christ. He shall gather together in one all things in Him as their Head. And as it is in Him that we have our true position as to our relationship with God the Father, so also is it with regard to the inheritance bestowed upon us. We are united to Christ in connection with that which is above us; we are so likewise with regard to that which is below. The apostle is speaking here first of Jewish Christians, who have believed in Christ before He is manifested; this is the force of “we who have first trusted in Christ.” If I may venture to use a new word, “who have pre-trusted in Christ” — trusted in Him before He appears. The remnant of the Jews in the last days will believe (like

Thomas) when they shall see Him. Blessed is he who shall have believed without seeing. The apostle speaks of those among the Jews who had already believed in Him.

In verse 13 he extends the same blessing to the Gentiles, which gives occasion for another precious truth with regard to us — a thing that is true of every believer, but that had special force with regard to those from among the Gentiles. God had put His seal on them by the gift of the Holy Ghost. They were not, according to the flesh, heirs of the promises; but, when they believed, God sealed them with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of the inheritance, both of the one and the other, Jews and Gentiles, until the possession acquired by Christ should be delivered to Him, until He should in fact take possession of it by His power — a power which will allow no adversary to subsist. Remark here, that the subject is not being born again, but a seal put on believers, a demonstration and earnest of their future full participation in the heritage that belongs to Christian inheritance to which He has a right through redemption, whereby He has purchased all things to Himself, but which He will only appropriate by His power when He shall have gathered together all the co-heirs to enjoy it with Him.

The Holy Ghost is not the earnest of love. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given unto us. God loves us as He will love us in heaven. Of the inheritance the Holy Ghost is but an earnest. We do not yet possess anything of the inheritance. Then we shall be to the praise of His glory. The glory of His grace is already revealed.

Thus we have here the grace which ordered the position of the children of God — the counsels of God respecting the glory of Christ as Head over all — the part which we have in Him as Heir — and the gift of the Holy Ghost to believers, as the earnest and seal (until they are put in possession with Christ) of the inheritance that He has won.

From verse 15 to the end, we have the apostle's prayer for the saints, flowing from this revelation — a prayer founded on the way in which the children of God have been brought into their blessings in Christ, and leading thus to the whole truth respecting the union of Christ and the assembly, and the place which Christ takes in the universe that He created as Son, and which He reassumes as man; and on the power displayed in

placing us, as well as Christ Himself, at the height of this position which God has given us in His counsels. This prayer is founded on the title of “God of our Lord Jesus Christ”; that of chapter 3 on the title of “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” There it is more communion than counsels. God is called the Father of glory here, as being its source and author. But not only is it said, “The God of our Lord Jesus Christ,” but we shall see also that Christ is viewed as man. God has wrought in Christ (v. 20), He has raised Him from among the dead — has made Him sit at His right hand. In a word, all that happened to Christ is considered as the effect of the power of God who has accomplished it. Christ could say, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up again in three days,” for He was God; but here He is viewed as man; it is God who raises Him up again.

There are two parts in this prayer: first, that they may understand what the calling and the inheritance of God are; and secondly, what the power is that puts them in possession of that which this calling confers upon them — the same power which sets Christ at the right hand of God, having raised Him from among the dead.

First, the understanding of the things given us. We find, it appears to me, the two things which, in the previous part of the chapter, we have seen to be the saint’s portion — the hope of the calling of God, and the glory of His inheritance in the saints. The first is connected with verses 3-5, that is, our calling; the second, with verse 11, that is, the inheritance. In the former we have found grace (that is, God acting towards us because He is love); in the latter, the glory — man manifested as enjoying in His Person and inheritance the fruits of the power and the counsels of God. God calls us to be before Him, holy and unblamable in love, and at the same time to be His sons. The glory of His inheritance is ours. Take notice that the apostle does not say “our calling,” although we are the called. He characterises this calling by connecting it with Him who calls in order that we may understand it according to its excellence, according to its true character. The calling is according to God Himself. All the blessedness and character of this calling are according to the fullness of His grace — are worthy of Himself. It is this which we hope for. It is also His inheritance, as the land of Canaan was His, as He had said in the law, and which nevertheless He inherited in Israel. Even so the inheritance of the whole universe, when it shall be filled with glory, belongs to Him, but He inherits it in the saints. It

is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. He will fill all things with His glory, and it is in the saints that He will inherit them. These are the two parts of the first thing to which the eyes of the saints were to be opened. By the calling of God we are called to enjoy the blessedness of His presence, near to Himself, to enjoy that which is above us. The inheritance of God applies to that which is below us, to created things, which are all made subject to Christ, with whom and in whom we enjoy the light of the presence of God near to Him. The apostle's desire is, that the Ephesians may understand these two things.

The second thing that the apostle asks for them is, that they may know the power already manifested, which had already wrought to give them part in this blessed and glorious position. For, even as they were introduced by the sovereign grace of God into the position of Christ before God His Father; so also the work which has been wrought in Christ, and the display of the power of God, which took place in raising Him from the grave to the right hand of God the Father above every name that is named, are the expression and the model of the action of the same power which works in us who believe, which has raised us from our state of death in sin to have part in the glory of this same Christ. This power is the basis of the assembly's position in her union with Him and of the development of the mystery according to the purposes of God. In person Christ raised up from among the dead is set at the right hand of God, far above all power and authority, and above every name that is named among the hierarchies by which God administers the government of the world that now is, or among those of the world to come. And this superiority exists, not only with regard to His divinity, the glory of which changes not, but with regard to the place given Him as man; for we speak here — as we have seen — of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is He who has raised Him from the dead, and who has given Him glory and a place above all; a place of which no doubt He was personally worthy, but which He receives, and ought to receive, as man from the hand of God, who has established Him as Head over all things, uniting the assembly to Him as His body, and raising up the members from their death in sins by the same power as that which raised up and exalted the Head — quickening them together with Christ, and seating them in the heavenly places in Him, by the same power that exalted Him. Thus the assembly, His body, is His fullness. It is indeed He



who fills all in all, but the body forms the complement of the Head. It is He, because He is God as well as man, who fills all things — and that, inasmuch as He is man, according to the power of redemption, and of the glory which He has acquired; so that the universe which He fills with His glory enjoys it according to the stability of that redemption from the power and effect of which nothing can withdraw it.\* It is He, I repeat, who fills the universe with His glory; but the Head is not isolated, left, so to speak, incomplete as such, without its body. It is the body that completes it in that glory, as a natural body completes the head; but not to be the head or to direct, but to be the body of the head, and that the head should be the head of its body. Christ is the Head of the body over all things. He fills all in all, and the assembly is His fullness. This is the mystery in all its parts. Accordingly we may observe that it is when Christ (having accomplished redemption) was exalted to the right hand of God, that He takes the place in which He can be the Head of the body.

[\* Compare chapter 4:9, 10: and this introduction of redemption, and the place Christ has taken as Redeemer, as filling all in all, is full of interest.]

Marvellous portion of the saints, in virtue of their redemption, and of the divine power that wrought in the resurrection of Christ, when He had died under our trespasses and sins, and set Him at the right hand of God: a portion which, save His personal session at the right hand of the Father, is ours also through our union with Him!

In **CHAPTER 2\*** the operation of the power of God on earth, for the purpose of bringing souls into the enjoyment of their heavenly privileges, and thus of forming the assembly here below, is presented, rather than the unfolding of the privileges themselves, and consequently that of the counsels of God. It is not even these counsels; it is the grace and the power which work for their fulfillment, by leading souls to the result which this power will produce according to those counsels. Christ is first seen, not as God come down here and presented to sinners, but as dead, that is, where we were by sin, but raised from it by power. He for sin had died; God had raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand. We were dead in our trespasses and sins: He has quickened us together with Him. But as it is the earth that is in question, and the operation of power and grace on the earth, the Spirit naturally speaks of the condition of those in whom this grace works, in fact of the condition of all. At the same time, in

the earthly forms of religion, in the system that existed on earth, there were those who were nigh and those who were far off. Now we have seen that in the full blessing of which the apostle speaks the nature of God Himself is concerned; in view of which, and to glorify which, all His counsels were settled. Therefore outward forms, although some of them had been established provisionally on the earth by God's own authority, could now have no value. They had served for the manifestation of the ways of God as shadows of things to come, and had been connected with the display of God's authority on earth among men, maintaining some knowledge of God — important things in their place; but these figures could do nothing as to bringing souls into relationship with God, in order to enjoy the eternal manifestation of His nature, in hearts made capable of it by grace, through their participation in that nature and reflecting it. For this, these figures were utterly worthless; they were not the manifestation of these eternal principles. But the two classes of man, Jews and Gentiles, were there; and the apostle speaks of them both. Grace takes up persons from both to form one body, one new man, by a new creation in Christ.

[\* It is this power which, raising the saints with Christ from the death of sin, and uniting them to Him the head, forms their relationship to Him as His body. The first part of the chapter gave our individual relationship to the Father, in that Christ is the firstborn among many brethren. Here we come to corporate relationship to Christ, the last and risen man. Up to the second part of the prayer we have the counsels of God. From the latter part we have the operations of power to accomplish them. And it is here our union with Christ first comes in, which, though God's counsels as to it are revealed, yet spiritually is wrought now, as seen in chapter 5.]

In the first two verses of this chapter he speaks of those who were brought out from among the nations that knew not God — Gentiles, as they are usually called. In verse 3 he speaks of the Jews — "We all also," he says. He does not enter here into the dreadful details contained in Romans 3,\* because his object is not to convince the individual, in order to show him the means of justification, but to set forth the counsels of God in grace. Here then he speaks of the distance from God in which man is found under the power of darkness. With regard to the nations, he speaks of the universal condition of the world. The whole course of the world, the entire system, was according to the prince of the power of the air; the world itself was under the government of him who worked in the hearts of

the children of disobedience, who in self-will evaded the government of God, although they could not evade His judgment.

- [\* Take especial notice here, that, in the Ephesians, the Spirit does not describe the life of the old man in sin. God and His own work are everything. Man is viewed as dead in his sins; that which is produced is therefore entirely of God, a new creation on His part. A man who lives in sin must die, must judge himself, must repent, by grace be cleansed; that is, he is dealt with as a living man. Here man is without any movement of spiritual life: God does everything; He quickens and raises up. It is a new creation.]

If the Jews had external privileges; if they were not in a direct way under the government of the prince of this world (as was the case with the nations that were plunged in idolatry, and sunk in all the degradation of that system in which man wallowed, in the licentiousness into which demons delighted to plunge him in derision of his wisdom); if the Jews were not, like the Gentiles, under the government of demons, nevertheless in their nature they were led by the same desires as those by which demons influenced the poor heathen. The Jews led the same life as to the desires of the flesh; they were children of wrath, even as others, for that is the condition of men; they are in their nature the children of wrath. In their outward privileges the Israelites were the people of God; by nature they were men as others. And remark here these words, “by nature.” The Spirit is not speaking here of a judgment pronounced on the part of God, nor of sins committed, nor of Israel having failed in their relationship to God through falling into idolatry and rebellion, nor even of their having rejected the Messiah and so deprived themselves of all resource — all of which Israel had done. Neither does He speak of a positive judgment from God pronounced on the manifestation of sin. They were, even as all men, in their nature the children of wrath. This wrath was the natural consequence of the state in which they were.\*

- [\* Faith, when taught by the word, always goes back to this: judgment refers to deeds done in the body. But we were dead in sins — no living movement of the heart towards God. We do not (John 5) come into judgment, but are passed from death unto life.]

Man as he was, Jew or Gentile, and wrath, naturally went together, even as there is a natural link between good and righteousness. Now God, though in judgment taking cognisance of all that is contrary to His will and glory, in His own nature is above all that. To those who are worthy of wrath He can be rich in mercy, for He is so in Himself. The apostle

therefore presents Him here as acting according to His own nature towards the objects of His grace. We were dead, says the apostle — dead in our trespasses and sins. God comes, in His love, to deliver us by His power — "God, who is rich in mercy, according to his great love wherewith he loved us." There was no good working in us: we were dead in our trespasses and sins. The movement came from Him, praised be His name! He has quickened us; not only that — He has quickened us together with Christ. He had not said in a direct way, that Christ had been quickened, although it may be said, where the power of the Spirit in Himself is spoken of. He was however raised from the dead; and, when we are in question, we are told that all the energy by which He came forth from death is employed also for our quickening; and not only that; even in being quickened we are associated with Him. He comes forth from death — we come forth with Him. God has imparted this life to us. It is His pure grace, and a grace that has saved us, that found us dead in sins, and brought us out of death even as Christ came out of it, and by the same power, and brought us out with Him by the power of life in resurrection — with Christ,\* to set us in the light and in the favor of God, as a new creation, even as Christ Himself is there. Jews and Gentiles are found together in the same new position in Christ. Resurrection has put an end to all those distinctions; they have no place in a risen Christ. God has quickened the one and the other with Christ.

[\* Here it is a wholly new creation, and the new estate is looked at simply in itself. We were dead towards God in our old one. Man is not looked at here as alive in sins and responsible, but as entirely dead in them, and created again: hence in this part of the epistle we have no forgiveness, no justification. The man is not looked at as a living responsible man. In Colossians we are risen with Christ, but "having forgiven you all trespasses" which Christ had born in coming down into death. Here, too, we have not the old man, and death brought into it, though both walk and the old man are recognised as facts, though not in connection with resurrection. In Colossians we have; even when "dead in your sins" is spoken of, it is added, "and the uncircumcision of your flesh," for it is dead towards God. The epistle to the Romans looks at responsible man in the world; hence you have fully justification, death to sin, and no resurrection with Christ. The man is a living man here, though justified, and alive in Christ.]

Now, Christ having done this, Jews and Gentiles, without the differences which death had abolished, are found together in the risen and ascended Christ, sitting together in Him in a new condition common to both — a condition described by that of Christ Himself.\* Poor sinners from among

the Gentiles, and from among the disobedient and gainsaying Jews, are brought into the position where Christ is, by the power which raised Him from the dead and set Him at God's right hand,\*\* to show forth in the ages to come the immense riches of the grace which had accomplished it. A Mary Magdalene, a crucified thief, companions in glory with the Son of God, all we who believe, will bear witness to it. It is by grace we are saved. Now we are not yet in the glory: it is by faith. Would any one say that at least the faith is of man? No + it is not of ourselves in this respect either; all is the gift of God; not of works, in order that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship.

[\* It is not merely life communicated (that we had in Romans), but a totally new place and standing which we have taken, life having the character of resurrection out of a state of death in sins. And here we are not viewed as quickened by Christ, but quickened with Him. He is the raised and glorified man.]

[\*\* In Colossians the saints are only seen risen with Christ, with a hope laid up for them in heaven, and are called to set their affections on things above, where Christ and their life with Him are hid. Moreover their resurrection with Christ is only an administrative one for this world in baptism, in connection with faith in the power which raised Christ. We have no union of Jews and Gentiles in Him as risen and in heavenly places. Indeed in Colossians, Gentiles only are before the mind of the apostle.]

[+ I am quite aware of what critics have to say here as to gender; but it is equally true as to grace, and to say, "by grace... and that not of yourselves," is simply nonsense; but by faith might be supposed to be of ourselves, though grace cannot. Therefore the Spirit of God adds, "and that not [it] not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." That is, the believing is God's gift, not of ourselves. And this is confirmed by what follows, "not of works." But the object of the apostle is to show that the whole thing was of grace and of God's workmanship — a new creation. So far, grace and faith and all go together.]

In how powerful a way the Spirit puts God Himself forward, as the source and operator of the whole, and the sole one! It is a creation, but, as His work, of a result which is in accordance with His own character. Now it is in us that this is done. He takes up poor sinners to display His glory in them. If it is the operation of God, assuredly it will be for good works: He has created us in Christ for them. And observe here that if God has created us for good works, these must in their nature be characterised by Him who has wrought in us, creating us according to His own thoughts. It is not man who seeks to draw nigh to God, or to satisfy Him by doing works that are

pleasing to Him according to the law — the measure of that which man ought to be; it is God who takes us up in our sins, when there is not one moral movement in our hearts (“none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God”), and creates us anew for works in accordance with this new creation. It is an entirely new position that we are placed in, according to this new creation of God — a new character that we are invested with according to the pre-determination of God. The works are pre-determined also according to the character which we put on by this new creation. All is absolutely according to the mind of God Himself. It is not duty according to the old creation.\* All is the fruit of God’s own thoughts in the new creation. The law disappears with regard to us even as to its works; together with the nature to which it applied. Man obedient to the law was man as he ought to be according to the first Adam; the man in Christ must walk according to the heavenly life of the second Adam, and walk worthy of Him as the Head of a new creation, being raised up with Him, and being the fruit of the new creation — worthy of Him who has formed him for this very thing (2 Corinthians 5:5).

[\* Not that God does not recognise the relationships He had originally formed — He does fully when we are in them; but the measure of the new creation is another thing.]

The Gentiles therefore enjoying this ineffable privilege — although the apostle does not recognise Judaism as a true circumcision — were to remember from whence they had been taken; without God and without hope as they were in the world, strangers to all the promises. But however far off they had been, now in Christ they were brought nigh by His blood. He had broken down the middle wall, having annulled the law of commandments by which the Jew, who was distinguished by these ordinances, was separated from the Gentiles. These ordinances had their sphere of action in the flesh. But Christ (as living in connection with all that), being dead, has abolished the enmity to form in Himself of the two — Jew and Gentile — one new man; the Gentiles brought nigh by the blood of Christ, and the middle wall of partition broken down, to reconcile both to God in one body; having by the cross not only made peace, but destroyed — by grace that was common to both, and to which one could make no more claim than the other, since it was for sin — the enmity that existed, till then, between the privileged Jew and the idolatrous Gentile far

from God, abolishing in His flesh the enmity, the law of commandments contained in ordinances.

Having made peace, He proclaimed it with this object to the one and the other, whether far off or nigh. For by Christ we all — whether Jews or Gentiles — have access by one Spirit to the Father. It is not the Jehovah of the Jews (whose name was not called upon the Gentiles); it is the Father of Christians, of the redeemed by Jesus Christ, who are adopted to form part of the family of God. Thus, albeit a Gentile, one is no longer a stranger or foreigner; one is of the christian and heavenly citizenship; of the true house of God Himself. Such is grace. As to this world, being thus incorporated in Christ, this is our position. All, Jew or Gentile, thus gathered together in one body, constitute the assembly on earth. The apostles and prophets (of the New Testament) form the foundation of the building, Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. In Him the whole building rises to be a temple, the Gentiles having their place, and forming with the others the dwelling-place on earth of God, who is present by His Spirit. Firstly, he looks at the progressive work which was being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the whole assembly according to the mind of God; and, secondly, he looks at the union which existed between the Ephesians and other believing Gentiles and the Jews, as forming God's house on the earth at that moment. God dwells in it by the Holy Ghost.\*

[\* It is exceedingly important in these days to see the difference between this progressive building, never complete till all believers who are to form Christ's body are gathered in, and the present temple of God on earth. In the former Christ is the builder. He carries it on without fail, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. This is not yet complete nor viewed as a whole till built. Hence in the Epistles we never find a builder in this case: in Peter, "unto whom coming as to a living stone, ye also as living stones are built up"; so here, in Ephesians, it grows to a holy temple in the Lord. But, besides this, the present manifested professing body is looked at as a whole on earth; and man is looked at as building. "Ye are God's building" (1 Corinthians 3). "I, as a wise masterbuilder, have laid the foundation: let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon." Man's responsibility comes in, and the work is the subject of judgment. It is the attributing to this the privileges of the body, and of that which Christ builds, that has produced popery and all that is akin to it. The corrupt thing which is to come under judgment is falsely clothed with the security of Christ's work. Here in Ephesians 2 we find not only the progressive and surely constructed work, but the present building together as a fact in the blessing of it, without reference to human responsibility in building.]

**CHAPTER 1** had set before us the counsels and purposes of God; beginning with the relationship of the sons and the Father, and, when the operation of God is spoken of, the assembly as the body of Christ united to Him who is Head over all things. Chapter 2, treating of the work which calls out the assembly, which creates it here below by grace, sets before us this assembly on the one hand, growing up to a holy temple, and then as the present habitation of God here below by the Spirit.\*

- [\* Chapter 2 speaks indeed of the body (v. 16); but the introduction of the house is a new element and requires some development. Although the work which is accomplished in the creation of the members who are to compose the body is all of God, it is accomplished on earth. The counsels of God have in view, first individuals, to place them near Himself, such as He would have them; then, having exalted Christ above every name now or hereafter, gives Him to be head of the body, formed of individuals united to Christ in heaven over all things. They will be perfect according to their Head. But the work on earth, if it gathers together the new-born, gathers them together on the earth. Now that which answers here below to the presence of Christ in heaven is the presence of the Holy Ghost on earth. The individual believer is indeed the temple of God, but in this chapter it is the whole body of Christians formed on earth that is spoken of; they become the house, the dwelling-place, of God on the earth. Wonderful and solemn truth. Immense privilege and source of blessing; but equally great responsibility. It will be observed that, in speaking of the body of Christ, we speak of the fruit of God's eternal purpose and own operation; and, although the Spirit may apply this name to the assembly of God on earth, as accounted to be composed of real members of Christ, nevertheless the body of Christ, as formed by the quickening power of God according to His eternal purpose, is composed of persons united to the Head as real members. The house of God, as now set up on earth, is the fruit of a work of God, here entrusted to men, not the proper object of His counsels (though the city in Revelation in a measure answers to it). In so far as it is the work of God, it is evident that this house is composed of those who are truly called of God, and so God set it up, and as it is spoken of here (compare Acts 2:47). But we must not confound the practical result of this work, accomplished in the hands of men, and under their responsibility (1 Corinthians 3), with the object of the counsels of God. A true member of Christ can no one be without being really united to the Head, neither a true stone in the house; but the house can be the dwelling-place of God, although that which is not a true stone may enter into its construction. But it is impossible that one not born of God should be a member of the body of Christ. See the preceding note.]

The whole of chapter 3 is a parenthesis unfolding the mystery; and presenting at the same time, in the prayer that concludes it, the second character of God set before us at the beginning of the epistle, namely, that of Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and this is the way in which it is here introduced. Chapter 1 gives the counsels of God as they are in themselves,



adding His raising Christ and setting Him above all on high at the end. Chapter 2, His work in quickening others with Him and forming the whole assembly of those who are risen in Christ, taken by grace from among Jews and Gentiles; these are God's thoughts and work. Chapter 3 is Paul's administration of it; it speaks especially of the bringing in of the Gentiles on the same footing as the Jews. This was the entirely new part of the ways of God.

Paul was a prisoner for having preached the gospel to the Gentiles — a circumstance that brought out his particular ministry very clearly. Thus ministry in the main is presented as in Colossians 1. Only in the latter epistle the whole subject is treated more briefly, and the essential principle and character of the mystery according to its place in the counsels of God is less explained, is viewed only on a special side of it, suited to the purpose of the epistle, that is, Christ and the Gentiles. Here the apostle assures us that he had received it by a special revelation, as he had already taught them in words which, though few, were suited to give a clear understanding of his knowledge of the mystery of Christ — a mystery never made known in the past ages, but now revealed by the Spirit to the apostles and prophets. Here it will be observed that the prophets are most evidently those of the New Testament, since the communications made to them are put in contrast with the degree of light granted in the previous ages. Now the mystery had been hidden in all former times; and in fact it needed so to be; for to have put the Gentiles on the same footing as the Jews would have been to demolish Judaism, such as God had Himself established it. In it He had carefully raised a middle wall of partition. The duty of the Jew was to respect this separation; he sinned, if he did not strictly observe it. The mystery set it aside. The Old Testament prophets, and Moses himself, had indeed shown that the Gentiles should one day rejoice with the people: but the people remained a separate people. That they should be co-heirs, and of the same body, all distinction being lost, had indeed been entirely hid in God (part of His eternal purpose before the world was), but formed no part of the history of the world, nor of the ways of God respecting it, nor of the revealed promises of God.

It is a marvelous purpose of God which, uniting redeemed ones to Christ in heaven as a body to its head, gave them a place in heaven. For, although

we are journeying on the earth, and although we are the habitation of God by the Spirit on the earth, yet in the mind of God our place is in heaven.

In the age to come the Gentiles will be blessed; but Israel will be a special and separate people.

In the assembly all earthly distinction is lost; we are all one in Christ, as risen with Him.

Thus the gospel of the apostle was addressed to the Gentiles, to announce thus good news to them according to the gift of God, which had been granted to Paul by the operation of His power, to proclaim to them not merely a Messiah according to the promises made to the fathers, a Jewish Christ, but a Christ whose riches were unsearchable. No one could trace to the end, and in all its development in Him, the accomplishment of the counsels, and the revelation of the nature of God. They are the incomprehensible riches of a Christ in whom God reveals Himself, and in whom all God's thoughts are accomplished and displayed. These purposes of God with regard to a Christ, the Head of His body the assembly, Head over all things in heaven and earth, Christ, God manifest in the flesh, were now made known and being accomplished, so far as gathering the joint-heirs in one body went. Saul, the inveterate enemy of Jesus proclaimed as Messiah, even if by the Holy Ghost from heaven — the worst therefore of all men — becomes by grace Paul, the instrument and witness of that grace to announce these incomprehensible riches to the Gentiles This was his apostolic function with regard to the Gentiles There was another — to enlighten all with regard to this mystery, which, from the beginning of the world, had been hidden in God. This answers to the two parts of the apostle's ministry pointed out in Colossians 1:23-25: as verse 27 in that chapter corresponds with verse 17 here. God, who created all things, had this thought, this purpose before creation, in order that, when He should subject all creation to His Son become a man and glorified, that Son should have companions in His glory, who should be like Himself, members of His body spiritual, living of His life.

He made known to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, which gave them a portion in the counsels of God in grace. He enlightened all with regard, not precisely, to the mystery, but to the administration\* of the mystery; that is to say, not only the counsel of God, but the

accomplishment in time of that counsel by bringing the assembly together under Christ its head. He who had created all things, as the sphere of the development of His glory, had kept this secret in His own possession, in order that the administration of the mystery, now revealed by the establishment of the assembly on earth, should be in its time the means of making known to the most exalted of created beings the manifold and various wisdom of God. They had seen creation arise and expand before their eyes; they had seen the government of God, His providence, His judgment; His intervention in lovingkindness on the earth in Christ. Here was a kind of wisdom altogether new; a thing outside the world, hitherto shut up in the mind of God, hid in Himself so that there was no promise or prophecy of it, but the special object of His eternal purpose; connected in a peculiar way with the One who is the center and the fullness of the mystery of godliness; which had its own place in union with Him; which, although it was manifested on earth and set with Christ at the head of creation, formed properly no part of it. It was a new part of it. It was a new creation, a distinct manifestation of the wisdom of God; a part of His thoughts which until then had been reserved in the secret of His counsels; the actual administration of which, on the earth in time by the apostle's work, made known the wisdom of God according to His settled purpose, according to His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus. "In whom," the apostle adds, "we draw nigh with all boldness by faith in him": and it is according to this relationship that we do so.

[\* This appears to me to be the true word, and not "the fellowship."

Therefore these Gentile believers were not to be discouraged on account of the imprisonment of him who had proclaimed to them this mystery; for it was the proof and the fruit of the glorious position which God had granted them, and of which the Jews were jealous.

This revelation of the ways of God does not, as the first chapter, present Christ to us as man raised up by God from the dead, in order that we should be raised up also to have part with Him, and that the administration of the counsels of God should thus be accomplished. It presents Him as the center of all the ways of God, the Son of the Father, the Heir of all things as the Creator Son, and the center of the counsels of God. It is to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that the apostle now addresses himself; as in chapter 1 it was to the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every

family (not “the whole family”) ranges itself under this name of Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Under the name of Jehovah there were only the Jews. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth,” had Jehovah said to the Jews in Amos, “therefore will I punish you for your iniquities”; but under the name of Father of Jesus Christ all families — the assembly, angels, Jews, Gentiles, all — range themselves. All the ways of God in that which He had arranged for His glory were co-ordained under this name, and were in relation with it; and that which the apostle asked for the saints to whom he addressed himself was, that they should be enabled to apprehend the whole import of those counsels, and the love of Christ which formed the assured center for their hearts.

For this purpose he desires that they should be strengthened with all might by the Spirit of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the Christ, who is the center of all these things in the counsels of God the Father, should dwell also in their hearts, and thus be the intelligent center of affection to all their knowledge — a center which found no circle to limit the view that lost itself in infinitude which God alone filled — length, breadth, height, depth.\* But this center gave them at the same time a sure place, a support immovable and well known, in a love which was as infinite as the unknown extent of the glory of God in its display around Himself. “That Christ,” says the apostle, “may dwell in your hearts.” Thus He, who fills all things with His glory, fills the heart Himself, with a love more powerful than all the glory of which He is the center. He is to us the strength which enables us in peace and love to contemplate all that He has done, the wisdom of His ways, and the universal glory of which He is the center.

[\* Christ is the center of all the display of divine glory, but He thus dwells in our hearts so as to set them, so to speak, in this center, and make them look out thence on all the glory displayed. Here we might lose ourselves; but he brings them back to the well-known love of Christ, yet not as anything narrower, for He is God, and it passes knowledge, so that we are filled up to all the fullness of God.]

I repeat it — He who fills all things fills above all our hearts. God strengthens us according to the riches of that glory which He displays before our wondering eyes as rightly belonging to Christ. He does it, in that Christ dwells in us, with tenderest affection, and He is the strength of our heart. It is as rooted and grounded in love; and thus embracing as the

first circle of our affections and thoughts, those who are so to Christ — all the saints the objects of His love: it is as being filled with Him, and ourselves as the center of all His affections, and thinking His thoughts, that we throw ourselves into the whole extent of God's glory; for it is the glory of Him whom we love. And what is its limit? It has none; it is the fullness of God. We find it in this revelation of Himself. In Christ He reveals Himself in all His glory. He is God over all things, blessed for ever.

But dwelling in love we dwell in God and God in us: and that in connection with the display of His glory, as He develops it in all that He has formed around Himself, to exhibit Himself in it, in order that Christ, and Christ in the assembly, His body, should be the center of it, and the whole the manifestation of Himself in His entire glory. We are filled unto all the fullness of God; and it is in the assembly that He dwells for this purpose. He works in us by His Spirit with this object. Therefore Paul's desire and prayer is that glory may be unto God in the assembly throughout all ages by Jesus Christ: Amen. And note, it is here realisation of what is spoken of that is desired. It is not, as chapter 1, objective, that they may know what is certainly true, but that it may be true for them, they being strengthened with might by His Spirit. It is very beautiful to see how, after launching us into the infinitude of God's glory, he brings us back to a known center in Christ — to know the love of Christ, but not to narrow us. It is more properly divine, though familiar to us, than the glory. It passes knowledge.

Observe too here, that the apostle does not now ask that God should act by a power, as it is often expressed, which works for us, but by a power that works in us.\* He is able to do above all that we can ask or think according to His power that works in us. What a portion for us! What a place is this which is given us in Christ! But he returns thus to the thesis proposed at the end of chapter 2, God dwelling in the assembly by the Spirit, and Christians, whether Jews or Gentiles, united in one. He desires that the Ephesian Christians (and all of us) should walk worthy of this vocation. Their vocation was to be one, the body of Christ; but this body in fact manifested on earth in its true unity by the presence of the Holy Ghost. We have seen (chap. 1) the Christian brought into the presence of God Himself; but the fact that these Christians formed the body of Christ, and that they were the dwelling-place of God here below, the house of

God on the earth — in a word, their whole position — is comprised in the expression, “their vocation.” Chapter 1, note, gives the saints before God; the prayer of chapter 3, Christ in them.

[\* This fully distinguishes the prayer of chapter I and this. There the calling and inheritance were in the sure purpose of God, and his prayer is that they may know them, and the power that brought them there. Here it is what is in us, and he prays that it may exist, and that as present power in the church.]

**CHAPTER 4.** Now the apostle was in prison for the testimony which he had born to this truth, for having maintained and preached the privileges that God had granted to the Gentiles, and in particular that of forming by faith, together with the believing Jews, one body united to Christ. In his exhortation he makes use of this fact as a touching motive. Now the first thing that he looked for on the part of his beloved children in the faith, as befitting this unity and as a means of maintaining it in practice, was the spirit of humility and meekness, forbearance with one another in love. This is the individual state which he desired to be realised among the Ephesians. It is the true fruit of nearness to God, and of the possession of privileges; if they are enjoyed in His presence.

At the end of chapter 2 the apostle had unfolded the result of the work of Christ in uniting the Jew and the Gentile, in making peace, and in thus forming the dwelling-place of God on the earth; Jew and Gentile having access to God by one Spirit through the mediation of Christ, both being reconciled to God in one body. To have access to God; to be the dwelling-place of God through His presence by the Holy Ghost; to be one body reconciled to God — such is the vocation of Christians. Chapter 3 had developed this in its whole extent. The apostle applies it in chapter 4.

The faithful were to seek — in the dispositions mentioned above — to maintain this unity of the Spirit by the bond of peace. There are three things in this exhortation: first, to walk worthy of their calling; second, the spirit in which they were to do so; third, diligence in maintaining the unity of the Spirit by the bond of peace. It is important to observe, that this unity of the Spirit is not similarity of sentiment, but the oneness of the members of the body of Christ established by the Holy Ghost, maintained practically by a walk according to the Spirit of grace. It is evident that the

diligence required for the maintenance of the unity of the Spirit relates to the earth and to the manifestation of this unity on the earth.

The apostle now founds his exhortation on the different points of view under which this unity may be considered — in connection with the Holy Ghost, with the Lord, and with God.

There is one body and one Spirit; not merely an effect produced in the heart of individuals, in order that they might mutually understand each other, but one body. The hope was one, of which this Spirit was the source and the power. This is the essential, real, and abiding unity.

There is also one Lord. With Him was connected “one faith” and “one baptism.” This is the public profession and recognition of Christ as Lord. Compare the address in 1 Corinthians.

Finally there is one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all.

What mighty bonds of unity! The Spirit of God, the lordship of Christ, the universal ubiquity of God, even the Father, all tend to bring into unity those connected with each as a divine center. All the religious relationships of the soul, all the points by which we are in contact with God, agree to form all believers into one in this world, in such a manner that no man can be a Christian without being one with all those who are so. We cannot exercise faith, nor enjoy hope, nor express christian life in any form whatever, without having the same faith and the same hope as the rest, without giving expression to that which exists in the rest. Only we are called on to maintain it practically.

We may remark, that the three spheres of unity presented in these three verses have not the same extent. The circle of unity enlarges each time. With the Spirit we find linked the unity of the body, the essential and real unity produced by the power of the Spirit uniting to Christ all His members: with the Lord, that of faith and of baptism. Here each individual has the same faith, the same baptism: it is the outward profession, true and real perhaps, but a profession, in reference to Him who has rights over those that call themselves by His name. With regard to the third character of unity, it relates to claims that extend to all things, although to the

believer it is a closer bond, because He who has a right over all things dwells in believers.\*

[\* To recapitulate, there is, first, one body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling; second, one Lord, with whom are connected one faith and one baptism; third, one God and Father of all, who is above all things, everywhere, and in all Christians. Moreover, while insisting upon these three great relationships in which all Christians are placed, as being in their nature the foundations of unity, and the motives of its maintenance, these relationships extend successively in breadth. The direct relationship applies properly to the same persons; but the character of Him who is the basis of the relationship enlarges the idea connected with it. With regard to the Spirit, His presence unites the body — is the bond between all the members of the body: none but the members of the body — and they, as such — are seen here. The Lord has wider claims. In this relationship it is not the members of the body that are spoken of; there is one faith and one baptism, one profession in the world: there could not be two. But although the persons who are in this outward relationship may stand also in the other relationships and be members of the body, yet the relationship here is one of individual profession; it is not a thing which cannot exist at all except in reality (one is a member of Christ's body, or one is not). God is the Father of these same members, as being His children, but He who maintains this relationship is necessarily and always above all things — personally above all things, but divinely everywhere.]

Observe here, that it is not only a unity of sentiment, of desire, and of heart. That unity is pressed upon them; but it is in order to maintain the realisation, and the manifestation here below, of a unity that belongs to the existence and to the eternal position of the assembly in Christ. There is one Spirit, but there is one body. The union of hearts in the bond of peace, which the apostle desires, is for the public maintenance of this unity; not that there might be patience with one another when that has disappeared, Christians contenting themselves with its absence. One does not accept that which is contrary to the word, although in certain cases those who are in it ought to be born with. The consideration of the community of position and of privilege, enjoyed by all the children of God in the relationships of which we have now been speaking, served to unite them with each other in the sweet enjoyment of this most precious position, leading them also, each one, to rejoice in love at the part which every other member of the body had in this happiness.

But, on the other hand, the fact that Christ was exalted to be in heaven the Head over all things, brought in a difference which appertained to this supremacy of Christ — a supremacy exercised with divine sovereignty and



wisdom. “Unto every one of us is given grace gift] according to the measure of the gift of Christ” (that is to say, as Christ sees fit to bestow). With regard to our position of joy and blessing in Christ, we are one. With regard to our service, we have each an individual place according to His divine wisdom, and according to His sovereign rights in the work. The foundation of this title, whatever may be the divine power that is exercised in it, is this: man was under the power of Satan — miserable condition, the fruit of his sin, a condition to which his self-will had reduced him, but in which (according to the judgment of God who had pronounced on him the sentence of death) he was a slave in body and mind to the enemy who had the power of death — with reservation of the sovereign rights and sovereign grace of God (see chap. 2:2). Now Christ has made Himself man, and began by going as man, led by the Spirit, to meet Satan. He overcame him. As to His personal power, He was able to drive him out everywhere, and to deliver man. But man would not have God with him; nor was it possible for men, in their sinful condition, to be united to Christ without redemption. The Lord however, carrying on His perfect work of love, suffered death, and overcame Satan in that his last stronghold, which God’s righteous judgment maintained in force against sinful man — a judgment which Christ therefore underwent, accomplishing a redemption that was complete, final, and eternal in its value; so that neither Satan, the prince of death and accuser of the children of God on earth, nor even the judgment of God, had anything more to say to the redeemed. The kingdom of Satan was taken from him; the just judgment of God was undergone and completely satisfied. All judgment is committed to the Son, and power over all men, because He is the Son of man. These two results are not yet manifested, although the Lord possesses all power in heaven and in earth. The thing here spoken of is another result which is accomplished meanwhile. The victory is complete. He has led the adversary captive. In ascending to heaven He has placed victorious man above all things, and has led captive all the power that previously had dominion over man.

Now before manifesting in person the power He had gained as man by binding Satan, before displaying it in the blessing of man on earth, He exhibits it in the assembly, His body, by imparting, as He had promised, to men delivered from the enemy’s dominion gifts which are the proof of that power.

**CHAPTER 1** had laid open to us the thoughts of God; chapter 2 the fulfillment, in power, of His thoughts with regard to the redeemed — Jews or Gentiles, all dead in their sins — to form them into the assembly. Chapter 3 is the especial development of the mystery in that which concerned the Gentiles in Paul's administration of it on earth. Here (chap. 4) the assembly is presented in its unity as a body, and in the varied functions of its members; that is to say, the positive effect of those counsels in the assembly here below. But this is founded on the exaltation of Christ, who, the conqueror of the enemy, has ascended to heaven as man.

Thus exalted, He has received gifts in man, that is, in His human character (compare Acts 2:33). It is thus "in man," that it is expressed in Psalm 68, from whence the quotation is taken. Here, having received these gifts as the Head of the body, Christ is the channel of their communication to others. They are gifts for men.

Three things here characterise Him — a man ascended on high — a man who has led captive him who held man in captivity — a man who has received for men, delivered from that enemy, the gifts of God, which bear witness to this exaltation of man in Christ, and serve as a means for the deliverance of others. For this chapter does not speak of the more direct signs of the Spirit's power, such as tongues, miracles — such as are usually termed miraculous gifts. But what the Lord as Head confers on individuals, they are the gifts, as His servants for forming the saints to be with Him, and for the edification of the body — the fruit of His care over them. Hence, as already remarked, their continuance (till we all, one after another, grow up to the head) is stated as to power, by the Spirit; in 1 Corinthians 12 it is not.

But let us pause here for a moment, to contemplate the import of that which we have been considering.

What a complete and glorious work is that which the Lord has accomplished for us, and of which the communication of these gifts is the precious testimony! When we were the slaves of Satan and consequently of death, as well as the slaves of sin, we have seen that He was pleased to undergo for the glory of God that which hung over us. He went down into death of which Satan had the power. And so complete was the victory of

man in Him, so entire our deliverance, that (exalted Himself as man to the right hand of God's throne — He who had been under death) He has rescued us from the enemy's yoke, and uses the privilege which His position and His glory give Him to make those who were captives before, the vessels of His power for the deliverance of others also. He gives us the right, as under His jurisdiction, of acting in His holy war, moved by the same principles of love as Himself. Such is our deliverance that we are the instruments of His power against the enemy — His fellow-laborers in love through His power. Hence the connection between practical godliness, the complete subjugation of the flesh, and the capacity to serve Christ as instruments in the hand of the Holy Ghost, and the vessels of His power.

Now the Lord's ascension has immense significance in connection with His Person and work. He ascended indeed as man, but He first descended as man even into the darkness of the grave and of death; and from thence victorious over the power of the enemy who had the power of death, and having blotted out the sins of His redeemed ones, and accomplished the glory of God in obedience — He takes His place as man above the heavens in order that He may fill all things; not only as being God, but according to the glory and the power of a position in which He was placed by the accomplishment of the work of redemption — a work which led Him into the depths of the power of the enemy, and placed Him on the throne of God — a position that He holds, not only by the title of Creator, which was already His, but by that of Redeemer, which shelters from evil all that is found within the sphere of the mighty efficacy of His work — a sphere filled with blessing, with grace, and with Himself. Glorious truth, which belongs at the same time to the union of the divine and human natures in the Person of Christ, and to the work of redemption accomplished by suffering on the cross!

Love brought Him down from the throne of God, and, being found as a man,\* through the same grace, into the darkness of death. Having died, bearing our sins, He has gone up again to that throne as man, filling all things. He went below the creature into death, and is gone above it.

[\* The descent into the lower parts of the earth is viewed as from His place as man on earth; not His coming down from heaven to be a man. It is Christ who descended.]

But while filling all things by virtue of His glorious Person, and in connection with the work which He accomplished, He is also in immediate relation with that which in the counsels of God is closely united to Him who thus fills all things, with that which has been especially the object of His work of redemption. It is His body, His assembly, united to Him by the bond of the Holy Ghost to complete this mystical man, to be the bride of this second Man, who fills all in all — a body which, as manifested here below, is set in the midst of a creation that is not yet delivered, and in the presence of enemies that are in the heavenly places, until Christ shall exercise, on the part of God His Father, the power that has been committed to Him as man. When Christ shall thus exercise His power, He will take vengeance on those who have defiled His creation by seducing man, who had been its head down here and the image of Him who was to be its Head everywhere. He will also deliver creation from its subjection to evil. Meanwhile, personally exalted as the glorious man, and seated at God's right hand until God shall make His enemies His footstool, He communicates the gifts necessary for the gathering together of those who are to be the companions of His glory, who are the members of His body, and who shall be manifested with Him when His glory shines forth in the midst of this world of darkness.

The apostle shows us here an assembly already delivered, and exercising the power of the Spirit; which on the one side delivers souls, and on the other builds them up in Christ, that they may grow up to the measure of their Head in spite of all the power of Satan which still subsists.

But an important truth is connected with this fact. This spiritual power is not exercised in a manner simply divine. It is Christ ascended (He however who had previously descended into the lower parts of the earth) who, as man, has received these gifts of power. It is thus that Psalm 68 speaks as well as Acts 2:33. The latter passage speaks also of the gifts bestowed on His members. In our chapter it is only in the latter way that they are mentioned. He has given gifts unto men.

I would also remark, that these gifts are not here presented as gifts bestowed by the Holy Ghost come down to earth, and distributing to every one according to His will: nor are those gifts spoken of which are tokens of spiritual power suited to act as signs upon those that are

outside: but they are ministrations for gathering together and for edification established by Christ as Head of the body by means of gifts with which He endows persons as His choice. Ascended on high, and having taken His place as man at the right hand of God, and filling all things, whatever may be the extent of His glory, Christ has first for His object to fulfill the ways of God in love in gathering souls, and in particular towards the saints and the assembly; to establish the manifestation of the divine nature, and to communicate to the assembly the riches of that grace which the ways of God display, and of which the divine nature is the source. It is in the assembly that the nature of God, the counsels of grace, and the efficacious work of Christ are concentrated in their object; and these gifts are the means of ministering, in the communication of these, in blessing to man.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers: apostles and prophets laying, or rather being laid, as the foundations of the heavenly building, and acting as coming directly from the Lord in an extraordinary manner; the two other classes (the last being sub-divided into two gifts, connected in their nature) belonging to ordinary ministry in all ages. It is important to remark also, that the apostle sees nothing existing before the exaltation of Christ save man the child of wrath, the power of Satan, the power which raised us up (dead in sins as we were) with Christ, and the efficacy of the cross, which had reconciled us to God, and abolished the distinction between Jew and Gentile in the assembly, to unite them in one body before God — the cross in which Christ drank the cup and bore the curse, so that wrath has passed away for the believer, and in which a God of love, a Savior God, is fully manifested.

So the existence of the apostles dates here only from the gifts that followed the exaltation of Jesus. The twelve as sent out by Jesus on earth have no place in the instruction of this epistle, which treats of the body of Christ, of the unity and the members of this body; and the body could not exist before the Head existed and had taken His place as such. Thus also we have seen that, when the apostle speaks of the apostles and prophets, the latter are to him those exclusively of the New Testament, and those who have been made such by Christ after His ascension. It is the new heavenly man who, being the exalted Head in heaven, forms His body on the earth. He does it for heaven, putting the individuals who compose it spiritually and intelligently in connection with the Head by the power of

the Holy Ghost acting in this body on the earth; the gifts, of which the apostle here speaks, being the channels by which His graces are communicated according to the bonds which the Holy Ghost forms with the Head.

The proper and immediate effect is the perfecting of individuals according to the grace that dwells in the Head. The shape which this divine action takes, further, is the work of the ministry, and the formation of the body of Christ, until all the members are grown up into the measure of the stature of Christ their Head. Christ has been revealed in all His fullness: it is according to this revelation that the members of the body are to be formed in the likeness of Christ, known as filling all things, and as the Head of His body, the revelation of the perfect love of God, of the excellency of man before Him according to His counsels, of man the vessel of all His grace, all His power, and all His gifts. Thus the assembly, and each one of the members of Christ, should be filled with the thoughts and the riches of a well-known Christ, instead of being tossed to and fro by all sort of doctrines brought forward by the enemy to deceive souls.

The Christian was to grow up according to all that was revealed in Christ, and to be ever increasing in likeness to his Head; using love and truth for his own soul — the two things of which Christ is the perfect expression. Truth displays the real relation of all things with each other in connection with the center of all things, which is God revealed now in Christ. Love is that which God is in the midst of all this. Now Christ, as the light, put everything precisely in its place, Satan, sin, righteousness, holiness, all things, and that in every detail, and in connection with God. And Christ was love, the expression of the love of God in the midst of all this. And this is our pattern; and our pattern as having overcome, and, as having ascended into heaven, our Head, to which we are united as the members of His body.

There flows from this Head, by means of its members, the grace needed to accomplish the work of assimilation to Himself. His body, compacted together, increases by the working of His grace in each member, and edifies itself in love.\* This is the position of the assembly according to God, until all the members of the body attain to the stature of Christ. The manifestation alas! of this unity is marred; but the grace, and the operation

of the grace of its Head to nourish and cause its members to grow, is never impaired, any more than the love in the Lord's heart from which this grace springs. We do not glorify Him, we have not the joy of being ministers of joy to each other as we might be; but the Head does not cease to work for the good of His body. The wolf indeed comes and scatters the sheep, but he cannot pluck them out of the Shepherd's hands. His faithfulness is glorified in our unfaithfulness without excusing it.

[\* Verse 11 gives special and permanent gifts; verse 16, what every joint supplies in its place. Both have their place in the forming and growth of the body.]

With this precious object of the ministration of grace (namely, for the growth of each member individually unto the measure of the stature of the Head Himself), with the ministration of each member in its place to the edifying itself in love, ends this development of the counsels of God in the union of Christ and the assembly, in its double character of the body of Christ in heaven, and the habitation of the Holy Ghost on earth — truths which cannot be separated, but each of which has its distinctive importance, and which reconcile the certain immutable operations of grace in the Head with the failures of the assembly responsible on the earth.

Exhortations to a walk befitting such a position follow, in order that the glory of God in us and by us, and His grace towards us, may be identified in our full blessing. We will notice the great principles of these exhortations.

The first is the contrast\* between the ignorance of a heart that is blind, and a stranger to the life of God, and consequently walking in the vanity of its own understanding, that is, according to the desires of a heart given up to the impulses of the flesh without God — the contrast, I say, between this state, and that of having learnt Christ, as the truth is in Jesus (which is the expression of the life of God in man, God Himself manifested in the flesh), the having put off this old man, which is corrupt itself according to its deceitful lusts, and put on this new man, Christ. It is not an amelioration of the old man; it is a putting it off, and a putting on of Christ.

[\* I have already noticed, that contrast of the new state and the old characterises the Ephesians more than Colossians, where we find more development of life.]

Even here the apostle does not lose sight of the oneness of the body; we are to speak the truth, because we are members one of another. "Truth," the expression of simplicity and integrity of heart, is in connection with "the truth as it is in Jesus," whose life is transparent as the light, as falsehood is in connection with deceitful lusts.

Moreover, the old man is without God, alienated from the life of God. The new man is created, it is a new creation, and a creation\* after the model of that which is the character of God righteousness and holiness of truth. The first Adam was not in that manner created after the image of God. By the fall the knowledge of good and evil entered into man. He can no longer be innocent. When innocent, he was ignorant of evil in itself. Now, fallen, he is a stranger to the life of God in his ignorance: but the knowledge of good and evil which he has acquired, the moral distinction between good and evil in itself, is a divine principle. "The man," said God, "is become as one of us, to know good and evil." But in order to possess this knowledge, and subsist in what is good before God, there must be divine energy, divine life.

[\* In Colossians we have "renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created us."

Everything has its true nature, its true character, in the eyes of God. That is the truth. It is not that He is the truth. The truth is the right and perfect expression of that which a thing is (and, in an absolute way, of that which all things are), and of the relations in which it stands to other things, or in which all things stand towards each other. Thus God could not be the truth. He is not the expression of some other thing. Everything relates to Him. He is the center of all true relationship, and of all moral obligation. Neither is God the measure of all things, for He is above all things; and nothing else can be so above them, or He would not be so.\* It is God become man; it is Christ, who is the truth, and the measure of all things. But all things have their true character in the eyes of God: and He judges righteously of all, whether morally or in power. He acts according to that judgment. He is just. He also knows evil perfectly, being Himself goodness, that it may be perfectly an abomination to Him, that He may repel it by His own nature. He is holy. Now the new man, created after the divine nature, is so in righteousness and holiness of truth. What a privilege!



What a blessing! It is, as another apostle has said, to be “partakers of the divine nature.” Adam had nothing of this.

- [\* There is a sense in which God is, morally, the measure of other beings — a consideration that brings out the immense privilege of the child of God. It is the effect of grace, in that, being born of Him and partaking of His nature, the child of God is called to be the imitator of God, to be perfect as His Father is perfect. He who loves is born of God, and knows God, for God is love. He makes us partakers of His holiness, consequently we are called to be imitators of God, as His dear children. This shows the immense privileges of grace. It is the love of God in the midst of evil, and which, superior to all evil, walks in holiness, and rejoices also together, in a divine way, in the unity of the same joys and the same sentiments. Therefore Christ says (John 17), “as we are,” and “in us.”

Adam was perfect as an innocent man. The breath of life in his nostrils was breathed into him by God, and he was responsible for obedience to God in a thing wherein neither good nor evil was to be known, but simply a commandment. The trial was that of obedience only, not the knowledge of good or evil in itself. At present, in Christ, the portion of the believer is a participation in the divine nature itself, in a being who knows good and evil, and who vitally participates in the sovereign good, morally in the nature of God Himself, although always thereby dependent on Him. It is our evil nature which is not so, or at least which refuses to be dependent on Him.

Now there is a prince of this world, a stranger to God; and, besides participation in the divine nature, there is the Spirit Himself who has been given to us. These solemn truths enter also as principles into these exhortations. “Give no place to the devil,” on the one hand — give him no room to come in and act on the flesh; and, on the other hand, “grieve not the Holy Spirit” who dwells in you. The redemption of the creature has not yet taken place, but ye have been sealed unto that day: respect and cherish this mighty and holy guest who graciously dwells in you. Let all bitterness and malice therefore cease even in word, and let meekness and kindness reign in you according to the pattern you have in the ways of God in Christ towards you. Be imitators of God: beautiful and magnificent privilege! but which flows naturally from the truth that we are made partakers of His nature, and that His Spirit dwells in us.

These are the two great subjective principles of the Christian — the having put off the old man and put on the new, and the Holy Ghost’s dwelling in

him. Nor can anything be more blessed than the pattern of life here given to the Christian, founded on our being a new creation. It is perfect subjectively and objectively. First, subjectively, the truth in Jesus is the having put off the old man and put on the new, which has God for its pattern. It is created after God in the perfection of His moral character. But this is not all. The Holy Spirit of God by which we are sealed to the day of redemption dwells in us: we are not to grieve Him. These are the two elements of our state, the new man created after God, and the presence of the Holy Spirit of God; and He is emphatically here called the Spirit of God, as in connection with God's character.

And next objectively: created after God, and God dwelling in us, God is the pattern of our walk, and thus in respect of the two words which alone give God's essence — love and light. We are to walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us a sacrifice to God. "For us" was divine love; "to God" is perfection of object and motive. Law takes up the love of self as the measure of love to others. Christ gives up self wholly and for us, but to God. Our worthlessness enhances the love but, on the other hand, an affection and a motive have their worth from the object (and with Christ that was God Himself), self wholly given up. For, so to speak, we may love up and love down. When we look upward in our affections, the nobler the object the nobler the affection; when it is downwards, the more unworthy the object, the more pure and absolute the love. Christ was perfect in both, and absolutely so. He gave Himself for us, and to God. Afterwards we are light in the Lord. We cannot say we are love, for love is sovereign goodness in God; we walk in it, like Christ. But we are light in the Lord. This is the second essential name of God and as partakers of the divine nature we are light in the Lord. Here again Christ is the pattern. "Christ shall give thee light." We are called on, then, as His dear children to imitate God.

This life, in which we participate and of which we live as partakers of the divine nature, has been objectively presented to us in Christ in all its perfection and in all its fullness; in man, and in man now brought to perfection on high, according to the counsels of God respecting Him. It is Christ, this eternal life, who was with the Father and has been manifested unto us — He who, having then first descended, has ascended now into heaven to carry humanity thither, and display it in the glory — the glory

of God — according to His eternal counsels. We have seen this life here in its earthly development: God manifest in flesh; man, perfectly heavenly, and obedient in all things to His Father, moved, in His conduct to others, by the motives that characterise God Himself in grace. Hereafter He will be manifested in judgment; and already, here below, He has gone through all the experiences of a man, understanding thus how grace adapts itself to our wants, and displaying it now, according to that knowledge, even as hereafter He will exercise judgment with a knowledge of man, not only divine, but which, having gone through this world in holiness, will leave the hearts of men without excuse and without escape.

But it is the image of God in Him, of which we are now speaking. It is in Him that the nature which we have to imitate is presented to us, and presented in man as it ought to be developed in us here below, in the circumstances through which we are passing. We see in Him the manifestation of God, and that in contrast with the old man. There we see “the truth as it is in Jesus,” save that in us it involves the putting off of the old man and putting on the new, answering to Christ’s death and resurrection (compare particularly as to His death, 1 Peter 3:18; 4:1). Thus, in order to attract and to lead on our hearts, to give us the model on which they are to be formed, the aim to which they should tend, God has given us an object in which He manifests Himself, and which is the object of all His own delight.

The reproduction of God in man is the object that God proposed to Himself in the new man; and that the new man proposes to himself, as he is himself the reproduction of the nature and the character of God. There are two principles for the Christian’s path, according to the light in which he views himself. Running his race as man towards the object of his heavenly calling, in which he follows after Christ ascended on high: he is running the heavenward race; the excellency of Christ to be won there, his motive — that is not the Ephesian aspect. In the Ephesians he is sitting in heavenly places in Christ, and he has to come out as from heaven, as Christ really did, and manifest God’s character upon earth, of which, as we have seen, Christ is the pattern. We are called, as in the position of dear children, to show our Father’s ways.

We are not created anew according to that which the first Adam was, but according to that which God is: Christ is its manifestation. And He is the second Man, the last Adam.\*

[\* It is useful to note here the difference of Romans 12:1, 2, and this epistle. The Romans, we have seen, contemplates a living man on earth; hence he is to give his body up as a living sacrifice — alive in Christ, he is to yield his members up wholly to God. Here the saints are seen as sitting in heavenly places already, and they are to come out in testimony of God's character before men, walking as Christ did in love, and light.]

In detail we shall find these characteristic features: truthfulness, the absence of all anger that has the nature of hatred (lying and hatred are the two characteristics of the enemy); practical righteousness connected with labor according to the will of God (man's true position); and the absence of corruption. It is man under the rule of God since the fall, delivered from the effect of the deceitful lusts. But it is more than this. A divine principle brings in the desire of doing good to others, to their body and their soul. I need not say how truly we find here the picture of the life of Christ, as in the preceding remarks it was the putting off of the spirit of the enemy and of the old man. The spirit of peace and love (and that, in spite of evil in others and the wrongs they may do us) completes the picture, adding that which will be easily understood after what has been said, that, in "forgiving one another," we are to be imitators of God, and to walk in love as Christ has loved us, and has given Himself for us. Beautiful picture, precious privilege! May God grant us so to look at Jesus as to have His image stamped upon us, and in some sort to walk like Him.

Moreover, let us remark here, and it is an important feature in this picture of the fruits of grace and of the new man, that when the grace and love, which come down from God, act in man, they always go up again to God in devotedness. Walk, he says, in love, even as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor. We see it in Christ. He is this love which comes down in grace, but this grace, acting in man, makes Him devote Himself to God, although it is on behalf of others. So it is in us; it is the touchstone of the christian heart's activity.

The apostle then speaks plainly as to sin, in order that no one may deceive himself; nor be occupied with deep truths, using them intellectually, to the

neglect of ordinary morality — one of the signs of heresy, properly so called. He has connected the profoundest doctrines in his teaching with daily practice. If Christ be glorified, the Head of the assembly, He is the model of the new man, the last Adam; the assembly being one with Him on high, and the habitation of God on earth by the Spirit, with whom every Christian is sealed. Every Christian, if indeed he has learned the truth as it is in Jesus, has learned that it consists in having put off the old man, and having put on the new man, created after God in righteousness and holiness (of which Christ is the model, according to the counsels of God in glory); and he is to grow up unto the measure of the stature of Christ, who is the Head, and not grieve the Holy Spirit wherewith he is sealed. The fullest revelation of grace does not weaken the immutable truth that God had a character proper to Himself; it unfolds that character to us by means of the most precious revelations of the gospel, and of the closest relationships with God, which were formed by these revelations: but this character could not alter, nor could the kingdom of God allow of, any characters contrary to it. The wrath of God therefore against evil, and against those who commit it, is plainly set forth.

Now we were that which is contrary to His character, we were darkness; not only in the dark, but darkness in our nature, the opposite of God who is light. Not one ray of that which He is was found in our will, our desires, our understanding. We were morally destitute of it. There was the corruptness of the first Adam, but no share in any feature of the divine character. We are now partakers of the divine nature, we have the same desires, we know what it is that He loves, and we love what He loves, we enjoy that which He enjoys, we are light (poor and weak indeed, yet such by nature) in the Lord-looked at as in Christ. They are the fruits of light\* that are developed in the Christian; he is to avoid all association with the unfruitful works of darkness.

[\* We should read “fruit of the light,” not “fruit of the Spirit.”

But, in speaking of motives, the apostle returns to the great subjects that pre-occupied him, and he returns to them, not only that we should put on the character set forth by that of which he speaks, but that we should realise all its extent, that we should experience all its force. He had told us that the truth in Christ was the having put on the new man, in contrast with the old man, and that we are not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Now he

exhorts those that sleep to awake, and Christ should be their light. Light makes all things manifest; but he who sleeps, although not dead, does not profit by it. For hearing, seeing, and all mental reception and communication, he is in the state of a dead man. Alas, how apt this sleep is to overtake us! But in awaking, it was not that they should see the light dimly, but Christ Himself should be the light of the soul; they should have all the full revelation of that which is well-pleasing to God, that which He loves; they should have divine wisdom in Christ; they should be able to profit by opportunities, should find them, being thus enlightened, in the difficulties of a world governed by the enemy, and should act according to spiritual understanding in every case that presented itself. Further, if they were not to lose their senses through means of excitement used in the world, they were to be filled with the Spirit, that is, that He should take such possession of our affections, our thoughts, our understanding, that He should be their only source according to His proper and mighty energy to the exclusion of all else. Thus, full of joy, we should praise, we should sing for joy; and we should give thanks for all that might happen, because a God of love is the true source of all. We should be full of joy in the spiritual realisation of the objects of faith, and the heart continuing to be filled with the Spirit and sustained by this grace, the experience of the hand of God in everything here below will give rise only to thanksgiving. It comes from His hand whom we trust and whose love we know. But giving thanks in all things is a test of the state of the soul; because the consciousness that all things are from God's hand, full trust in His love, and deadness as to any will of our own, must exist in order to give thanks in everything — a single eye which delights in His will.

In entering into the details of relationships and particular duties, the apostle cannot give up the subject that is so dear to him. The command which he addresses to wives, that they are to submit themselves to their husbands, immediately suggests the relationship between Christ and the assembly, not now as a subject for knowledge, but to unfold His affection and tender care. We have seen that the apostle, having established the great principles displayed in the revelation of our relationship with God — our vocation — then deduces their practical consequences with regard to the life and conduct of Christians: they were to walk as having put on the new man, to have Christ for their light, not to grieve the Spirit, to be filled with

the Spirit. Now all this, while the fruit of grace, was either knowledge or practical responsibility.

But here the subject is viewed in another aspect. It is the grace that acts in Christ Himself, His affections, His guardian care, His devotedness to the assembly. Nothing can be more precious, more tender, more intimate. He loved the assembly — that is the source of all. And there are three steps in the work of this love. He gave Himself for it, He washes it, He presents it all glorious to Himself. This is not precisely the sovereign election of the individual by God; but the affection that displays itself in the relationship which Christ maintains with the assembly.\* See also the extent of the gift, and how marvelous the ground of confidence that it contains. He gives Himself; it is not only His life, true as that is, but Himself.\*\* All that Christ was has been given, and given by Himself; it is the entire devotedness and giving of Himself. And now all that is in Him — His grace, His righteousness, His acceptance with the Father, the excellent glory of His Person, His wisdom, the energy of divine love that can give itself — all is consecrated to the welfare of the assembly. There are no qualities, no excellencies in Christ, which are not ours in their exercise consequent on the gift of Himself. He has already given them, and consecrated them to the blessing of the assembly which He has given Himself to have. Not only are they given, but He has given them; His love has accomplished it.

[\* It is well to notice here this character of love — love in an established relationship. The word of God is more exact than is generally thought in its expressions; because the expression has its origin in the thing itself. It is not said that Christ loved the world — He has no relationship with the world as it is. It is said that God so loved the world; this is what He is towards it in His own goodness. It is not said that God loved the assembly. The proper relationship of the assembly as such is with Christ, her heavenly Bridegroom. The Father loves us, we are His dear children. God, in this character, loves us. Thus Jehovah loves Israel. On the other hand, all the tenderness and faithfulness that belong to the relationship in which Christ stands are our portion in Him, as well as all that the name of Father means on its side also.]

[\*\* It is specially the devotedness of His love; He gives and gives Himself.]

We know well that it is on the cross that this giving of Himself was accomplished, it is there that the consecration of Himself to the good of the assembly was complete. But here that glorious work is not exactly

viewed on the side of its atoning and redeeming efficacy, but on that of the devotedness and love to the assembly which Christ manifested in it. Now we can always reckon upon this love which was perfectly displayed in it. It is not altered. Jesus — blessed and praised be His name for it! — is for me according to the energy of His love in all that He is, in all circumstances and for ever, and in the activity of that love according to which He gave Himself. He loved the assembly and gave Himself for it. This is the source of all our blessings, as members of the assembly.

But this love of Christ is inexhaustible and unchangeable. It effects the blessing of its cherished object, by preparing it for a happiness of which His heart is alike the measure and the source,\* to happiness of perfect purity, the excellence of which He knows in heaven — purity suited to the presence of God, and to her who should be in that presence for ever, the bride of the Lamb — purity which renders it capable of enjoying perfect love and glory; even as that love tends to purify the soul by making itself known to it, and attracting it, divesting it of self, and filling it with God as the center of blessing and joy.

[\* When I say (here and above) that the love of Christ is its source, it is not as if the love of the Father and the counsels of God had not their place in it. I speak of the blessing applied and carried out in the relationship presented in this passage; and this relationship exists with Christ. Nevertheless it is the same divine love.]

It is important to remark that Christ does not here sanctify the assembly to make it His own, but makes it His own to sanctify it. It is first His, then He suits it to Himself. Christ, who loves the church as being His own, and who has already made it His own by giving Himself for it, and who chooses to have it such as His heart desires, occupies Himself with it, when He has won it, to render it such. He gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify it by the washing of water by the word. Here we find that moral effect produced by the care of Christ, the object which He proposes to Himself in His work accomplished in time, and the means He uses to attain it. He appropriates the assembly morally, sets it morally apart for Himself, when He has made it His; for He can only desire holy things — holy according to the knowledge He has of purity — by virtue of His eternal and natural abode in heaven. He then puts the assembly in connection with heaven, from whence He is, and into which He will introduce it. He gave Himself in order to sanctify it. For this purpose He



uses the word, which is the divine expression of the mind of God, of heavenly order and holiness, of truth itself (that is to say, of the true relation of all things with God; and that according to His love in Christ), and which consequently judges all that deviates from it as to purity or love.

He forms the assembly for His bride, a help-meet for Him, in which all is according to the glory and the love of God, by the revelation (through the word, which comes from thence) of these things as they exist in heaven. Now Christ Himself is the full expression of these things, the image of the invisible God. Thus, in communicating them to the assembly, He prepares it for Himself. When speaking therefore in this sense of His own testimony, He says, “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.”

But it is this which the word is, as we have received it from Jesus; and more especially as speaking from heaven, with the character of the new commandment, the darkness passing away, and the true light now shining; and consequently, the thing being true, not only in Him, but in us. The ministry of chapter 1 is occupied with this, forming the hearts of the saints on earth in fellowship with the Head from which the grace and the light descended. In this manner then Christ sanctifies the assembly for which He gave Himself. He has formed it for heavenly things by the communication of heavenly things, of which He is Himself the fullness and the glory. But this word finds the assembly mixed up with things that are contrary to this heavenly purity and love. Alas! its affections — as to the old man at least — mixed up with these earthly things, which are contrary to the will of God and to His nature. Thus in sanctifying the assembly He must needs cleanse it. This is therefore the work of the love of Christ during the present time, but for the eternal and essential happiness of the assembly.

He sanctifies the assembly, but He does it by the word, communicating heavenly things — all that belongs to the nature, to the majesty, and to the glory of God — in love, but at the same time applying them to judge everything in her present affections, which is at variance with that which He communicates. Precious work of love, which not only loves us but

labors to make us fit to enjoy that love; fit to be with Christ Himself in the Father's house!

How deeply is He interested in us! He not only accomplished the glorious work of our redemption by giving Himself for us, but He acts continually with perfect love and patience to make us such as He would have us to be in His own presence — fit for the heavenly places and heavenly things.

What a character this shows to belong also to the word, and what grace in His use of it! It is the communication of divine things according to their own perfection, and now as God Himself is in the light. It is the revelation of God Himself, as we know Him in a glorified Christ, in a perfect love to form us also according to that perfection for the enjoyment of Him; and yet it is addressed to us, yea is suited in its very nature to us down here (compare John 1:4) to impart these things to us by bringing in light amid the darkness, thus necessarily judging all that is in the darkness, but in order to purify us in love.

Observe, also, the order in which this work of Christ is presented to us, beginning with love. He loved the assembly; this, as we have already said, is the source of all. All that follows is the result of that love and cannot gainsay it. The perfect proof of it is then stated: He gave Himself for the assembly. He could not give more. It was to the glory of the Father, no doubt, but it was for the assembly. Had he reserved anything, the love in giving Himself would not have been perfect, not absolute; it would not have been a devotedness that left nothing for the awakened heart to desire. It would not have been Christ, for He could not but be perfect. We know love and perfection in knowing Him. But He has won the heart of the assembly by giving Himself for it. He has won her thus. She is His according to that love. Yea; it is there that we have learnt what love is. Hereby know we love in that He gave Himself for us. All was for the glory of the Father: without that it would not have been perfection; and the revelation of the heavenly things would not have taken place, for that depended on the Father's being perfectly glorified. In this the things to be revealed were manifested and verified, so to speak, in spite of evil; but all is entirely for us.

If we have learnt to know love, we have learnt to know Jesus, such as He is for us; and He is wholly for us.

Thus the entire work of cleansing and of sanctification is the result of perfect love. It is not the means of obtaining the love, or of being its object. It is indeed the means of enabling us to enjoy it; but it is the love itself which, in its exercise, works this sanctification. Christ wins the assembly first. He then in His perfect love makes it such as He would have it to be — a truth that is precious to us in every way, and first, in order to free the soul from all servile fear, to give sanctification its true character of grace and its true extent here. It is joy of heart to know that Christ Himself will make us all He desires us to be.

We have considered two effects of the love of Christ for the assembly. The first was the gift of Himself, which in a certain sense comprises the whole; it is love perfect in itself. He gave Himself. The second is the moral formation of the object of His love, that it may be with Him; according, we may add, to the perfections of God Himself, for that indeed is what the word is — the expression of the nature, the ways, and the thoughts of God.

There is yet a third effect of this love of Christ's which completes it. He presents it to Himself a glorious assembly without spot or wrinkle. If He gave Himself for the assembly, it was in order to have it with Him; but if He would have it with Him, He must render it fit to be in His glorious presence; and He has sanctified it by cleansing it according to the revelation of God Himself, and the heavenly things of which He is in Himself the center in glory. The Holy Ghost has taken the things of Christ, and has revealed them to the assembly; and all that the Father has is Christ's. Thus perfected according to the perfection of heaven, He presents it to Himself a glorious assembly. Morally, the work was done; the elements of heavenly glory had been communicated to her who was to stand in that glory, had entered into her moral being, and thus formed her to participate in it. The power of the Lord is needed to make her participate in it in fact, to make her glorious, to destroy every trace of her earthly abode, save the excellent fruit that results from it. He presents her glorious to Himself — this is the result of all. He took her for Himself, He presents her to Himself, the fruit and the proof of His perfect love; and for her it is the perfect enjoyment of that same love. But there is yet more. That sentence discloses to us all the import of this admirable display of grace. The Spirit carries us back to the case of Adam and Eve, in which

God, having formed Eve, presents her to Adam all complete according to His own divine thoughts and at the same time suited to be the delight of Adam, as a help-meet adapted to his nature and condition. Now Christ is God. He has formed the assembly, but with this additional right over her heart that He has given Himself for her; but He is also the last Adam in glory; and He presents her glorified to Himself, such as He had formed her for himself. What a sphere for the development of spiritual affections is this revelation! What infinite grace is that which has given place for such an exercise of these affections!

We cannot fail to notice the connection between the cleansing and the glory, that is, that the cleansing is according to the glory and by it; and that the glory is the completeness of, and completely answers to, the cleansing. For the cleansing is by the word, which reveals the whole glory and mind of God. Presented in glory she has neither spot nor wrinkle; she is holy and unblamable. This is a most important truth, and recurs elsewhere. Compare 2 Corinthians 3:18, and Philippians 3:11 to the end. So in 1 Thessalonians 3:13. What is complete in glory there, is wrought into the soul now by the Spirit operating with the word.

This then is the purpose, the mind of the Lord, with regard to the assembly, and this the sanctifying work which prepares her for Himself and for heaven. But these are not all the effects of His love. He watches tenderly over her during all the time of her sojourn here below.

The apostle, who did not lose sight of the thesis which gave rise to this digression that is so instructive to us, says that the husband ought to love his wife as his own body — that it was loving himself. He was naturally led to this by the allusion to Genesis; but he immediately returns to the subject that occupies him. No one, he says, ever hated his own flesh; he nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the assembly. This is the precious aspect, during time, of Christ's love, which the apostle here presents. Not only has Christ a heavenly aim, but His love performs the work which, so to speak, is natural to it. He tenderly cares for the assembly here below; He nourishes it, He cherishes it. The wants, the weaknesses, the difficulties, the anxieties of the assembly are only opportunities to Christ for the exercise of His love. The assembly needs to be nourished, as do our bodies; and He nourishes her. She is the object of

His tender affections; He cherishes her. If the end is heaven, the assembly is not left desolate here. She learns His love where her heart needs it. She will enjoy it fully when need has passed away for ever. Moreover it is precious to know that Christ cares for the assembly, as a man cares for his own flesh. For we are members of His own body. We are of His flesh, and of His bones. Eve is here alluded to. We are, as it were, a part of Himself, having our existence and our being from Him, as Eve from Adam. He can say, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Our position is, on the one hand, to be members of His body; on the other hand, we have our existence as Christians from Him. Therefore it is that a man is to leave his natural relations, in order to be united to his wife. It is a great mystery. Now it was just this that Christ did as man, in a certain sense, divinely. Nevertheless every one ought thus to love his own wife, and the wife to reverence her husband.

There remain yet certain relationships in life, with which the doctrine of the Spirit of God is connected: those of children and parents, of fathers and children, and of servants and master. It is interesting to see the children of believers introduced as objects of the Holy Spirit's care, and even slaves (for servants were such), raised by Christianity to a position which the circumstances of their social degradation could not affect.

All the children of Christians are viewed as subjects of the exhortations in the Lord, which belong to those who are within, who are no longer in this world, of which Satan is the prince. Sweet and precious comfort to the parent, that he may look upon them as having a right to this position, and a part in those tender cares which the Holy Ghost lavishes on all who are in the house of God! The apostle marks the importance which God attached, under the law, to this duty. It is the first command with which He linked a promise. Verse 3 is only the quotation of that which he alludes to in verse 2.

The exhortation to fathers is also remarkable — that they should not provoke their children; that their hearts should be turned towards them; that they should not repel them, nor destroy that influence which is the strongest guard against the evil of the world. God forms the heart of children around this happy center: the father should watch over this. But there is more. The christian father (for it is always those within to whom

he speaks) ought to recognise the position in which, as we have seen, the children are placed, and to bring them up under the yoke of Christ in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. Christian position is to be the measure and the form of the influences which the father exercises, and of the education which he gives his children. He treats them as brought up for the Lord, and as the Lord would bring them up.

It will be remarked, that in the two relationships we are considering, as well as in that of wives with their husbands, it is on the side from which submission is due that the exhortations begin. This is the genius of Christianity in our evil world, in which man's will is the source of all the evil, expressing his departure from God to whom all submission is due. The principle of submission and of obedience is the healing principle of humanity: only God must be brought into it, in order that the will of man be not the guide after all. But the principle that governs the heart of man in good, is always and everywhere obedience. I may have to say that God must be obeyed rather than man; but to depart from obedience is to enter into sin. A man may have, as a father, to command and direct; but he does it ill if he do it not in obedience to God and to His word. This was the essence of the life of Christ: "I come to do thy will, O my God." Accordingly the apostle begins his exhortations with regard to relationships by giving the general precept: "Submit yourselves one to another." This renders order easy, even when the order of institutions and of authority may fail. Submission, moral obedience, can never in principle be wanting to the true Christian. It is the starting-point of his whole life. He is sanctified unto the obedience of Christ (1 Peter 1:2).

In the case which has led to these remarks, it is striking to see how this principle elevates the slave in his condition: he obeys by an inward divine principle, as though it were Christ Himself whom he obeyed. However wicked his master may be, he obeys as if he obeyed Christ Himself. Three times the apostle repeats this principle of obedience to Christ or the service of Christ, adding, "doing the will of God from the heart." What a difference this made in the poor slave's condition! Moreover, whether bond or free, each should receive his reward from the Lord. The master himself had the same Master in heaven, with whom there is no respect of persons. Still it is to masters that he says this, not to the slave; for Christianity is delicate in its propriety, and never falsifies its principles.

The master was also to treat the slave with perfect equity — even as he expected it from the slave — and was not to threaten.

It is beautiful to see the way in which divine doctrine enters into the details of life, and throws the fragrance of its perfection into every duty and every relationship; how it acknowledges existing things, as far as they can be owned and directed by its principles, but exalts and enhances the value of everything according to the perfection of those principles; by touching not the relationships but the man's heart who walks in them; taking the moral side, and that of submission, in love and in the exercise of authority which the divine doctrine can regulate, bringing in the grace which governs the use of the authority of God.

But it is not only that there is a line of conduct to follow, a model to imitate, a Spirit with whom one may be filled, it is not only relationships between oneself and God, and those in which we stand here below; this is not all that must occupy the Christian. He has enemies to fight. The people of Israel under Joshua in the land of Canaan were indeed in the promised land, but they were in conflict there with enemies who were in it before them, although not according to the rights by which Israel possessed the land through the gift of God. God had set it apart for Israel (see Deuteronomy 32:8); Ham had taken possession of it.

Now, with regard to us, it is not with flesh and blood that we have to fight, as was the case With Israel. Our blessings are spiritual in the heavenly places. We are sitting in Christ in the heavenlies. We are a testimony to principalities and powers in the heavenlies; we have to wrestle with spiritual wickednesses in the heavenlies. Israel had passed through the wilderness — had crossed the Jordan; the manna had ceased; they ate the corn of the land. They were settled in the land of Canaan as though it were all their own without striking a blow. They ate the produce of this good land in the plains of Jericho. So it is with regard to the Christian. Although we are in the wilderness, we are also in the heavenly places in Christ. We have crossed the Jordan, we have died and are risen again with Him. We are sitting in the heavenly places in Him, that we may enjoy the things of heaven as the fruit of our own country. But conflict is before us, if we desire to enjoy them practically. The promise is of every blessing, of all the promised land, but wheresoever we shall set our foot on it (Joshua 1).

For this we need the Lord's strength, and of this the apostle now speaks. "Be strong," he says, "in the Lord." The enemy is subtle. We have to withstand his stratagems even more than his power. Neither the strength nor even the wisdom of man can do anything here. We must be armed with the panoply, that is, the whole armor, of God.

But observe first, that the Spirit turns our thoughts upon God Himself before speaking of that which has to be overcome. "Be strong in the Lord." It is not, first of all, a refuge from the face of the enemy; we are in it for ourselves before we use it against the wiles of the enemy. It is in the intimacy of the counsels and the grace of God that man fortifies himself for the warfare from which he cannot escape, if he would enjoy his christian privileges. And he must have the whole armor. To be wanting in one piece exposes us to Satan on that side. The armor must be that of God — divine in its nature. Human armor will not ward off the attacks of Satan; confidence in that armor will engage us in the battle only to make us fall in combat with a spirit who is more mighty and more crafty than we are.

These enemies are thus characterised; they are principalities and powers — beings possessing an energy of evil which has its source in a will that has mastery over those who do not know how to resist it; they have also strength to carry it out. Their energy they have from God, the will that uses it comes from themselves; they have forsaken God; the spring of their actions is in their own will. In this respect it is a source of action independent of God, and the energy and the qualities which they have from God are the instruments of that will — a will which has no bridle except from outside itself. They are principalities and powers. There are good ones; but in them the will is only to do that which God wills, and to employ in His service the strength they have received from Him.

These rebellious principalities and powers rule over the darkness of this world. Light is the atmosphere in which God dwells, which He diffuses all around Himself. Wicked spirits deceive and reign in darkness. Now this world, not having the light of God, is entirely in darkness, and demons reign in it; for God is not there — except in supreme power after all, turning everything to His glory, and, in the end, to the good of His children.



But if these principalities rule in the darkness of this world they do not possess merely an outward force; they are in the heavenlies, and are occupied with spiritual wickedness there. They exercise a spiritual influence, as having the place of gods. There is then, first, their intrinsic character, their mode of being, and the state in which they are found; second, their power in the world as governing it; and third, their religious and delusive ascendancy, as lodging in the heavens. They have also, as a sphere for the exercise of their power, the lusts of man, and even the terrors of his conscience.

To resist enemies like these we need the armor of God. The manifestations of this power, when God permits it, constitute the evil days. All this present period of Christ's absence is, in a certain sense, the evil day. Christ has been rejected by the world, of which, while in it, He was the light, and is hidden in God. This power, which the enemy displayed when he led the world to reject Christ, he still exercises over it: we oppose it by the action and the power of the Holy Ghost, who is here during the Lord's absence. But there are moments when this power is allowed to show itself in a more especial manner, when the enemy uses the world against the saints, darkening the light which shines in it from God, troubling and leading astray the minds of professors and even of believers — days, in a word, in which his power makes itself felt. We have to wrestle with this power, to resist it all, to stand against everything in the confession of Christ, of the light; we have to do all that the confession of His name requires in spite of all and at whatever cost, and to be found standing when the storm and the evil day are past.

Thus we have not only to enjoy God and the counsels of God and their effect in peace; but, since these very counsels introduce us into heavenly places and make us the light of God on earth, we have also to encounter the spiritual wickednesses which are in the heavenly places, and which seek to make us falsify our high position, to mislead us, and to darken the light of Christ in us on the earth. We have to escape the snares of heavenly spiritual wickedness for ourselves, and to maintain the testimony here below incorrupt and pure.\*

[\* Still what we have to overcome are the wiles of the devil. His power over us is broken. He may rouse the world in persecution and be a roaring lion; but as regards personal temptations, if we resist the devil he flees from us; he

knows he has met Christ, and Christ has overcome. But his wiles are ever there.]

Now by the power of the Holy Ghost, who has been given to us for this purpose, we shall find that the armor of God relates first to that which, by setting the flesh aside, and by maintaining the existence of a good conscience, takes all hold from the enemy; then, to the preservation of complete objective trust in God; and next, to the active energy which stands with confidence in the presence of the enemy, and using the weapons of the Holy Ghost against him. The defensive armor our own state, comes first. The whole ends with the expression of the entire and continual dependence on God in which the christian warrior stands.

We will examine this armor of God, that we may know it. It is all practical — founded on that which has been accomplished, but in itself practical. For it is not a question here of appearing before the bar of God, but of resisting the enemy, and of maintaining our ground against him.

Before God our righteousness is perfect, it is Christ Himself, and we are the righteousness of God in Him: but we do not need armor there, we are sitting in the heavenly places: all is peace, all is perfect. But here we need armor, real practical armor, and first of all to have the loins girt about with truth. The loins are the place of strength when duly girt, but represent the intimate affections and movements of the heart. If we allow our hearts to wander where they will, instead of abiding in communion with God, Satan has easy hold upon us. This piece of armor is then the application of the truth to the most intimate movements, the first movements of the heart. We gird up the loins. This is done, not when Satan is present; it is a work with God, which is done by applying the truth to our souls in His presence, judging everything in us by this means, and putting a bridle on the heart that it may only move under His eye. This is true liberty and true joy, because the new man enjoys God in uninterrupted communion; but here the Spirit speaks of it with respect to the safeguard which it will be to us against the attacks of the enemy. At the same time it is not merely the repression of evil thoughts — that is its consequence: it is the action of the truth, of the power of God, acting by the revelation of everything as it is — of all that He Himself teaches, bringing the conscience into His presence, keeping it thus in His thoughts; all that God has said in His word, and the unseen realities having their true force and their application

to the heart that stirs in us, so that its movements should have their character from God's own word and not from its own desires, everything going on in the presence of God.\*

[\* Girding the loins is a common figure of scripture for a mind and heart kept in godly order as in God's presence by the word of God.]

Satan has no hold on a heart thus kept in the truth, as revealed by God; there is nothing in its desires that answers to the suggestions of Satan. Take Jesus as an example. His safeguard was not in judging all that Satan said. In the wilderness at the beginning of His public service, except in the last temptation, it was in the perfect application of the word for Himself, for that which concerned His own conduct, to the circumstances around Him. The truth governed His heart, so that it only moved according to that truth in the circumstance that presented itself "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." No word has come forth — He does nothing. There was no motive for acting. It would have been to act of His own accord, of His own will. That truth kept His heart in connection with God in the circumstance that met Him. When the circumstance arose, His heart was already in intercourse with God, so that it had no other impulse than that which the word of truth suggested. His conduct was purely negative, but it flowed from the light which truth threw upon the circumstance, because His heart was under the absolute government of the truth. The suggestion of Satan would have brought Him out of this position. That was enough. He will have nothing to do with it. He does not yet drive away Satan: it was only a matter of conduct, not of flagrant opposition to the glory of God. In the latter case He drives him away; in the former He acts according to God without concerning Himself with anything farther. Satan's device totally failed of its effect. It simply produced nothing. It is absolutely powerless against the truth, because it is not the truth; and the hearth has truth for its rule. Wiles are not the truth: this is quite enough to prevent our being caught by them, that is, if the heart be thus governed.

In the second place there is the breastplate of righteousness — a conscience that has nothing to reproach itself with. The natural man knows how a bad conscience robs him of strength before men. There is only to be added here the way in which Satan uses it to entrap man in his snares. By maintaining the truth we have Satan for our enemy. If we yield ourselves

up to error, he will leave us in that respect at peace, except in using our faults and crimes to enslave us more, to bind us hand and foot in that which is false. How would a man who has the truth, who has perhaps even escaped error, if his conduct were bad, bear to have it exposed to the eyes of all? He is silent before the enemy. His own conscience even will make him silent, if he is upright, without thinking of consequences, unless a confession be necessary. Besides this the strength of God and spiritual understanding will fail him: where could he have gained them in a wrong walk? We go forward boldly when we have a good conscience. But it is when we are walking with God, for the love of God, for the love of righteousness itself, that we have this breastplate on, and thus we are fearless when called to go forward and face the enemy. We gain a good conscience before God by the blood of the Lamb. By walking with God we maintain it before men and for communion with God, in order to have strength and spiritual understanding, and to have them increasingly. This is the practical strength of good conduct, of a conscience without rebuke. "I exercise myself" always to this, said the apostle. What integrity in such a walk, what truthfulness of heart when no eye sees us! We are peremptory with ourselves, with our own hearts, and with regard to our conduct; we can therefore be peaceful in our ways. God also is there. So walk, says the apostle, and the God of peace shall be with you. If the fruits of righteousness are sown in peace, the path of peace is found in righteousness. If I have a bad conscience, I am vexed with myself, I grow angry with others. When the heart is at peace with God and has nothing to reproach itself with, when the will is held in check, peace reigns in the soul. We walk on the earth, but the heart is above it in intercourse with better things; we walk in a peaceful spirit with others, and nothing troubles our relations with God. He is the God of peace. Peace, the peace of Jesus, fills the heart. The feet are shod with it; we walk in the spirit of peace.

But, together with all this, a piece of defensive armor is needed over all the rest, that we may be able to stand in spite of all the wiles of the enemy — an armor, however, which is practically maintained in its soundness by the use of the preceding ones, so that, if the latter is essential, the others have the first place in practice. This is the shield, faith; that is to say, full and entire trust in God, the consciousness of grace and of His favor maintained in the heart. Here faith is not simply the reception of God's testimony

(although it is founded on that testimony), but the present assurance of the heart with regard to that which God is for us, founded, as we have just said, on the testimony which He has given of Himself — trust in His love and in His faithfulness, as well as in His power. “If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.” The work of the Spirit in us is to inspire this confidence. When it exists, all the attacks of the enemy, who seeks to make us believe that the goodness of God is not so sure — all his efforts to destroy or to weaken in our hearts this confidence in God and to hide Him from us, prove fruitless. His arrows fall to the ground without reaching us. We stand fast in the consciousness that God is for us: our communion is not interrupted. The fiery darts of the enemy are not the desires of the flesh, but spiritual attacks.

Thus we can hold up our heads: moral courage, the energy which goes forward, is maintained. Not that we have anything to boast of in ourselves, but the salvation and the deliverance of God are fresh in our minds. God has been for us; He is for us: who shall be against us? He was for us when we had no strength; it was salvation, when we could do nothing. This is our confidence — God Himself — not looking at ourselves. We have the helmet of salvation on our heads. The former parts of the armor give us freedom to enjoy the two latter.

Thus furnished with that which protects us in our walk, and in the practical confidence in God, and the knowledge of God that flows from it, we are in a state to use offensive weapons. We have but one against the enemy, but it is one that he cannot resist if we know how to handle it: witness the Lord’s conflict in the wilderness with Satan. It is the word of God. There Jesus always answered with the word by the power of the Spirit. It sets man in his true position according to God as obedient man in the circumstances around him. Satan can do nothing there: we have but to maintain that position. If Satan openly tempts us to disobedience, there is no wile in that. Not being able to do anything else, Satan acted thus with the Lord, and manifested himself as he is. The Lord drove him away by the word. Satan has no power when he is manifested as Satan. We have to resist the wiles of the devil. Our business is to act according to the word, come what may; the result will show that the wisdom of God was in it. But observe here, this sword is the sword of the Spirit. It is not the intelligence or the capacity of man, although it is man who uses the word.

His sword is highly tempered, but he can neither draw it nor strike with it if the Holy Ghost is not acting in him. The weapons are spiritual; they are used by the power of the Spirit. God must speak, however weak the instrument may be.

The sword is also used actively in the spiritual warfare, in which it judges all that is opposed to us. In this sense it is both defensive and offensive. But, behind all this armor, there is a state, a disposition, a means of strength, which quickens and gives all the rest its power: this is a complete dependence on God, united to trust in Him, which expresses itself in prayer. “Praying always”; this dependence must be constant. When it is real, and I feel that I can do nothing without God, and that He wills my good in all things, it expresses itself. It seeks the strength which it has not: it seeks it from Him in whom it trusts. It is the motion of the Spirit in our hearts in their intercourse with God, so that our battles are fought in the communion of His strength and His favor, and in the consciousness that we can do nothing, and that He is all. “At all times”; “with supplication.” This prayer is the expression of the man’s need, of the heart’s desire, in the strength that the Spirit gives him, as well as in confidence in God. Also since it is the Spirit’s act, it embraces all saints, not one of whom can be forgotten by Jesus; and the Spirit in us answers the affections of Christ, and reproduces them. We must be watchful and diligent in order to use this weapon; avoiding all that would turn us away from God, availing ourselves of every opportunity, and finding, by the grace of the Spirit, in everything that arises, an occasion (by means of this diligence) for prayer and not for distraction.\*

[\* Prayer is founded on the immense privilege of having common interests with God both as to ourselves and as to all that are His, yea, even as to Christ’s glory. Wondrous thought! unspeakable grace!

The apostle asks from his heart for this intercession on their part, in the sense of his own need and of that which he desires to be for Christ.

The mission of Tychicus expressed Paul’s assurance of the interest which the love of the Ephesians made them take in having tidings of him, and that which he himself felt in ascertaining their welfare and spiritual state in Christ. It is a touching expression of his confidence in their affection — an affection which his own devoted heart led him to expect in others.

He presents the Ephesians as enjoying the highest privileges in Christ, and as being able to appreciate them. He blames them in nothing. The armor of God — by which to repel the assaults of the enemy, and to grow up in peace unto the Head in all things, the preservative armor of God — was naturally the last thing that he had to set before them. It is to be noticed that he does not speak to them in this epistle of the Lord's coming. He supposes believers in the heavenly places in Christ; and not as on earth, going through the world, waiting till He should come to take them to Himself, and restore happiness to the world. That which is waited for in this epistle is the gathering together of all things under Christ, their true Head, according to the counsels of God. The blessings are in the heavens, the testimony is in the heavens, the church is sitting in the heavens, the warfare is in the heavens.

The apostle repeats his desire for them of peace, love, and faith; and concludes his epistle with the usual salutation by his own hand.

This epistle sets forth the position and the privileges of the children, and of the assembly in its union with Christ.

## PHILIPPIANS

In the epistle to the Philippians we find much more of christian experience, and the development of the exercise of the heart, than in the generality of the epistles. It is in fact proper christian experience. Doctrine and practice are found in them all, but, with the exception of the second to Timothy which is of another nature, there is none that contains like this, the expression of the Christian's experience in this toilsome life, and the resources which are open to him in passing through it, and the motives which ought to govern him. We may even say that this epistle gives us the experience of christian life in its highest and most perfect expression — say, rather, its normal condition under the power of the Spirit of God. God has condescended to furnish us with this beautiful picture of it, as well as with the truths that enlighten us, and the rules that direct our walk.

The occasion for it was quite natural. Paul was in prison, and the Philippians (who were very dear to him, and who, at the commencement of his labors, had testified their affection for him by similar gifts) had just sent assistance to the apostle by the hand of Epaphroditus at a moment when, as it appears, he had been for some time in need. A prison, need, the consciousness that the assembly of God was deprived of his watchful care, this expression on the part of the Philippians of the love that thought of him in his necessities, although at a distance — what could be more adapted to open the apostle's heart, and lead to his expressing the confidence in God that animated him, as well as what he felt with regard to the assembly, unsupported now by his apostolic care, and having to trust God Himself without any intermediate help? And it was most natural that he should pour out his feelings into the bosom of these beloved Philippians, who had just given him this proof of their affection. The apostle therefore speaks more than once of the Philippians' fellowship with the gospel: that is to say, they took part in the labors, the trials, the necessities which the preaching of the gospel occasioned to those who devoted themselves to it. Their hearts united them to it — like those of whom the Lord speaks who received a prophet in the name of a prophet.



This brought the apostle into a peculiarly intimate connection with this assembly; and he and Timotheus, who had accompanied him in his labors in Macedonia, his true son in the faith and in the work, address themselves to the saints and to those who bore office in this particular assembly. This is not an epistle which soars to the height of God's counsels, like that to the Ephesians, or which regulates the godly order which becomes Christians everywhere, like the two to the Corinthians; nor is it one which lays the foundation for the relationship of a soul with God, like that to the Romans. Neither was it destined to guard Christians against the errors that were creeping in among them, like some of the others which were written by our apostle. It takes the ground of the precious inner life, of the common affection of Christians towards each other, but of that affection as experienced in the heart of Paul, animated and directed by the Holy Ghost. Hence also we find the ordinary relationships which existed within an assembly: there are bishops and deacons, and it was the more important to remember them, since the immediate care of the apostle was no longer possible. The absence of this immediate care forms the basis of the apostle's instructions here, and gives its peculiar importance to the epistle.

The affection of the Philippians, which expressed itself by sending help to the apostle, reminded him of the spirit they had always shown; they had cordially associated themselves with the labors and trials of the gospel. And this thought leads the apostle higher, to that which governs the current of thought (most precious to us) in the epistle. Who had wrought in the Philippians this spirit of love and of devotedness to the interests of the gospel? Truly it was the God of the glad tidings and of love; and this was a security that He who had begun the good work would fulfill it unto the day of Christ. Sweet thought! — now that we have no longer the apostle, that we have no longer bishops and deacons, as the Philippians had in those days. God cannot be taken from us; the true and living source of all blessing remains to us, unchangeable, and above the infirmities, and even the faults, which deprive Christians of all intermediate resources. The apostle had seen God acting in the Philippians. The fruits bore witness of the source. Hence he counted on the perpetuity of the blessing they were to enjoy.\* But there must be faith in order to draw these conclusions. Christian love is clear-sighted and full of trust with regard to its objects, because God Himself, and the energy of His grace, are in that love.

[\* Read in verse 7 as in the margin, “because ye have me in your hearts.”

To return to the principle — it is the same thing with the assembly of God. It may indeed lose much, as to outward means, and as to those manifestations of the presence of God, which are connected with man’s responsibility; but the essential grace of God cannot be lost. Faith can always count upon it. It was the fruits of grace which gave the apostle this confidence, as in Hebrews 6:9, 10; 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 4. He counted indeed, in 1 Corinthians 1:8, and in Galatians, on the faithfulness of Christ in spite of many painful things. The faithfulness of the Lord encouraged him with regard to Christians, whose condition in other respects was the cause of great anxiety. But here — surely a much happier case — the walk itself of the Christian led him to the source of confidence about them. He remembered with affection and tenderness the way in which they had always acted towards him, and he turned it into a desire for them that the God who had wrought it would produce for their own blessing the perfect and abundant fruits of that love.

He opens his own heart also to them. They took part, by the same grace acting in them, in the work of God’s grace in him, and that with an affection that identified itself with him and his work; and his heart turned to them with an abundant return of affection and desire. God, who created these feelings, and to whom he presented all that passed in his heart, this same God who acted in the Philippians, was a witness between them (now that Paul could give no other by his labor among them) of his earnest desire for them all. He felt their love, but he desired moreover, that this love should be not only cordial and active, but that it should be guided also by wisdom and understanding from God, by a godly discernment of good and evil, wrought by the power of His Spirit; so that, while acting in love, they should also walk according to that wisdom, and should understand that which, in this world of darkness, was truly according to divine light and perfection, so that they should be without reproach until the day of Christ. How different from the cold avoidance of positive sin with which many Christians content themselves! The earnest desire of every excellence and likeness to Christ which divine light can show them is that which marks the life of Christ in us.

Now the fruits produced were already a sign that God was with them; and He would fulfill the work unto the end. But the apostle desired that they

should walk throughout the whole of the way according to the light that God had given, so that when they came to the end there should be nothing with which they could be reproached: but that, on the contrary, set free from all that might weaken or lead them astray, they should abound in the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. A fine practical picture of the Christian's normal condition in his daily work towards the end; for, in the Philippians, we are always on the way towards our heavenly rest in which redemption has set us.

Such is the introduction to this epistle. After this expression of the wishes of his heart for them, reckoning on their affection, he speaks of his bonds, which they had remembered; but he does so in connection with Christ and the gospel, which he had most of all at heart. But, before I go beyond the introduction into the matter of the epistle, I would notice the thoughts which lie at the foundation of the sentiments expressed in it.

There are three great elements which stamp their character on it.

Firstly, it speaks of the Christian's pilgrimage in the wilderness; salvation is viewed as a result to be obtained at the end of the journey. Redemption accomplished by Christ is indeed established as the foundation of this pilgrimage (as was the case with Israel at their entrance into the wilderness), but the being presented risen and in glory before God, when victorious over every difficulty, is the subject in this epistle, and is that which is here called salvation.

In the second place, the position is characterised by the apostle's absence, the assembly having therefore itself to maintain the conflict. It had to overcome, instead of enjoying the victory gained over the enemy's power by the apostle when he was with them and could make himself weak with all who were weak.

And, thirdly, the important truth, already mentioned, is set forth, that the assembly, in these circumstances, was cast more immediately on God — the inexhaustible source for it of grace and strength, of which it was to avail itself in an immediate way by faith — a resource which could never fail it.\*

[\* We shall find the whole tenor of a life which was the expression of the power of the Spirit of God brought out in it. It marks this, that sin, or the flesh as

working evilly in us, is not mentioned in the epistle. It gives the forms and features of the life of Christ; for if we live in the Spirit, we should walk in the Spirit. We shall find the graciousness of christian life (chap. 2), the energy of christian life (chap. 3), and its superiority to all circumstances (chap. 4). The first more opens the apostle's heart as to his actual circumstances and feelings, as was natural. Exhortation begins with chapter 2. Still even in chapter 1 we find the apostle entirely superior to circumstances in the power of spiritual life.]

I resume the consideration of the text with verse 12, which begins the epistle after the introductory portion. Paul was a prisoner at Rome. The enemy appeared to have gained a great victory in thus restraining his activity; but by the power of God, who orders all things and who acted in the apostle, even the devices of the adversary were turned to the furtherance of the gospel. In the first place, the imprisonment of the apostle made the gospel known, where it would not otherwise have been preached, in high places at Rome; and many other brethren, reassured as to the apostle's position,\* became more bold to preach the gospel without fear. But there was another way in which this absence of the apostle had an effect. Many — who, in the presence of his power and his gifts, were necessarily powerless and insignificant persons — could make themselves of some importance, when, in the unsearchable but perfect ways of God, this mighty instrument of His grace was set aside. They could hope to shine and attract attention when the rays of this resplendent light were intercepted by the walls of a prison. Jealous but hidden when he was present, they availed themselves of his absence to bestir themselves; whether false brethren or jealous Christians, they sought in his absence to impair his authority in the assembly, and his happiness. They only added to both. God was with His servant; and, instead of the self-seeking which instigated these sorry preachers of the truth, there was found in Paul the pure desire for the proclamation of the good news of Christ, the whole value of which he deeply felt, and which he desired above all, be it in what way it might.

[\* In the first edition I had taken this as the effect of the apostle's imprisonment in arousing the faith of those inactive when he was active. And this would be the sense of the English translation and is a true principle. But it seems that the force of the words is "rather got confidence as to my bonds." They were in danger of being ashamed of him, as if he were a malefactor.]

Already the apostle finds his resource for his own case, in God's operating independently of the spiritual order of His house with regard to the means

that He uses. The normal condition of the assembly is that the Spirit of God acts in the members of the body, each one in its place, for the manifestation of the unity of the body and of the reciprocal energy of its members. Christ, having overcome Satan, fills with His own Spirit those whom He has delivered out of the hand of that enemy, in order that they may exhibit at the same time the power of God and the truth of their deliverance from the power of the enemy, and exhibit them in a walk, which, being an expression of the mind and energy of God Himself, leaves no room for those of the enemy. They constituted the army and the testimony of God in this world against the enemy. But then, each member, from an apostle down to the weakest, acts efficaciously in his own place. The power of Satan is excluded. The exterior answers to the interior, and to the work of Christ. He who is in them is greater than he who is in the world. But everywhere power is needed for this, and the single eye. There is another state of things, in which, although all is not in activity in its place, according to the measure of the gift of Christ, yet the restoring energy of the Spirit in an instrument like the apostle defends the assembly, or brings it back into its normal condition, when it has partially failed. The epistle to the Ephesians, on the one side, and those to the Corinthians and Galatians, on the other, present these two phases of the history of the assembly.

The epistle to the Philippians treats — but with the pen of a divinely inspired apostle — of a state of things in which this last resource was wanting. The apostle could not labor now in the same manner as before, but he could give us the Spirit's view of the state of the assembly, when, according to the wisdom of God, it was deprived of these normal energies. It could not be deprived of God. Doubtless the assembly had not then departed so far from its normal condition as it has now done, but the evil was already springing up. All seek their own, says the apostle, not the things of Jesus Christ; and God allowed it to be so during the life of the apostles, in order that we might have the revelation of His thoughts respecting it, and that we might be directed to the true resources of His grace in these circumstances.

Paul himself had to experience this truth in the first place. The bonds that united him to the assembly and to the work of the gospel were the strongest that exist on earth; but he was obliged to resign the gospel and

the assembly to the God to whom they belonged. This was painful; but its effect was to perfect obedience, trust, singleness of eye, and self-renunciation, in the heart, that is, to perfect them according to the measure of the operation of faith. Nevertheless the pain caused by such an effort betrays the inability of man to maintain the work of God at its own height. But all this happens in order that God may have the whole glory of the work; and it is needed, in order that the creature may be manifested in every respect according to the truth. And it is most blessed to see how, both here and in 2 Timothy, the decay of individual life and ecclesiastical energy brings out a fuller development of personal grace on one hand and ministerial energy on the other, where there is faith, than is found anywhere else. Indeed it is always so. The Moseses, and Davids, and Elijahs are found in the time of the Pharaohs, and Sauls, and Ahabs.

The apostle could do nothing: he had to see the gospel preached without him — by some through envy and in a spirit of contention, by others through love; encouraged as regards the apostle's bonds, these desired to alleviate them by continuing his work. Every way Christ was preached, and the apostle's mind rose above the motives which animated the preachers in the contemplation of the immense fact, that a Savior, the deliverer sent of God, was preached to the world. Christ, and even souls were more precious to Paul than the work's being carried on by himself. God was carrying it on; and therefore it would be for the triumph of Paul, who linked himself with the purposes of God.\* He understood the great conflict which was going on between Christ (in his members) and the enemy; and if the latter appeared to have gained a victory by putting Paul in prison, God was using this event for the advancement of the work of Christ by the gospel, and thus in reality for the gaining of fresh victories over Satan — victories with which Paul was associated, since he was set for the defence of that gospel. Therefore all this turned to his salvation, his faith being confirmed by these ways of a faithful God, who directed the eyes of His faithful servant more entirely upon Himself. Sustained by the prayers of others and by the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, instead of being cast down and terrified by the enemy, he gloried more and more in the sure victory of Christ in which he shared. Accordingly he expresses his unchangeable conviction, that in nothing should he be made ashamed, but that it would be given him to use all boldness, and that Christ would be

glorified in him, whether by his life or his death; and he had death before his eyes. Called to appear before Caesar, his life might be taken from him by the emperor's judgment; humanly speaking the issue was quite uncertain. He alludes to this, chapter 1:22, 30; 2:17; 3:10. But, living or dying, his eye was now more fixed on Christ than even on the work, high placed as that work might have been in the mind of one whose life could be expressed in this one word — "Christ." To live was for him — not the work in itself, nor only that the faithful should stand fast in the gospel, although this could not be separated from the thought of Christ, because they were members of His body — Christ; to die was gain, for he should be with Christ.

[\* There is blessed faith in this. But then a man must have made the work his life. "To me to live is Christ." If so, if the work prospers, he prospers; if Christ is glorified, he is content, even if the Lord has laid him aside.]

Such was the purifying effect of the ways of God, who had made him pass through the ordeal, so terrible to him, of being separated for years, perhaps four, from his work for the Lord. The Lord Himself had taken the place of the work — so far at least as it was connected with Paul individually; and the work was committed to the Lord Himself. Possibly the fact that he was so engrossed with the work had contributed to that which led to his imprisonment; for the thought of Christ alone keeps the soul in equilibrium, and gives everything its right place. God caused this imprisonment to be the means through which Christ became his all. Not that he lost his interest in the work, but that Christ alone held the first place; and he saw everything, and even the work, in Christ.

What consolation it is, when we are perhaps conscious that our weakness has been manifested, and that we have failed in acting according to the power of God, to feel that He, who alone has a right to be glorified, never fails!

Now, since Christ was everything to Paul, it was evident gain to die, for he would be with Him. Nevertheless it was worth while to live (for this is the force of the first part of verse 21), because it was Christ and His service; and he did not know which to choose. Dying, he gained Christ for himself: it was far better. Living, he served Christ; he had more, as to the work, since to live was Christ, and death of course would put a stop to that. Thus he was in a strait between the two. But he had learnt to forget

himself in Christ; and he saw Christ entirely occupied with the assembly according to His perfect wisdom. And this decided the question; for being thus taught of God, and not knowing for himself which to choose, Paul lost sight of himself, and thought only of the need of the assembly according to the mind of Christ. It was good for the assembly that he should remain — for one assembly even: thus he should remain. And see what peace this looking to Jesus, which destroyed selfishness in the work, gives to the servant of God. After all, Christ has all power in heaven and earth, and He orders all things according to His will. Thus when His will is known — and His will is love for the assembly — one can say that it will be done. Paul decides as to his own fate, without troubling himself as to either what the emperor would do, or the circumstances of the time. Christ loved the assembly. It was good for the assembly that Paul should remain; Paul shall then remain. How entirely Christ is everything here! What light, what rest, from a single eye, from a heart versed in the Lord's love! How blessed to see self so totally gone, and Christ's love to the assembly seen thus to be the ground on which all is ordered!

Now if Christ is all this for Paul and for the assembly, Paul desires that the assembly should be that which it ought to be for Christ, and thereby for his own heart to which Christ was everything. To the assembly therefore the apostle's heart turns. The joy of the Philippians would be abundant through his return to them; only let their conduct, whether he came or not, be worthy of the gospel of Christ. Two thoughts possessed his mind, whether he should see them or hear tidings of them, that they might have constancy and firmness in unity of heart and mind among themselves; and be devoid of fear with regard to the enemy, in the conflict they had to maintain against him, with the strength that this unity would give them. This is the testimony of the presence and operation of the Spirit in the assembly, when the apostle is absent. He keeps Christians together by His presence; they have but one heart and one object. They act in common by the Spirit. And, since God is there, the fear with which the evil spirit and their enemies might inspire them (and it is what he ever seeks to do; compare 1 Peter 5:8) is not there. They walk in the spirit of love and power and of a sound mind. Their condition is thus an evident testimony of salvation — entire and final deliverance — since in their warfare with the enemy they feel no fear, the presence of God inspiring them with other



thoughts. With regard to their adversaries, the discovery of the impotence of all their efforts produces the sense of the insufficiency of their resources. Although they had the whole power of the world and of its prince, they had met with a power superior to their own — the power of God, and they were its adversaries. A terrible conviction on the one side; profound joy on the other, where not only there was thus the assurance of deliverance and salvation, but they were proved to be salvation and deliverance from the hand of God Himself. Thus, that the assembly should be in conflict, and the apostle absent (himself wrestling with all the power of the enemy), was a gift. Joyful thought! unto them it was given to suffer for Christ, as well as to believe in Him. They had a further and a precious portion in suffering with Christ, and even for Christ; and communion with His faithful servant in suffering for His sake united them more closely in Him.

Note, here, how thus far we have the testimony of the Spirit to a life above the flesh, not of it. In nothing he had been ashamed, and fully trusted he never should be, but Christ magnified in his body, were his lot life or death, as He ever had been. He does not know whether to choose life or death, both were so blessed; to live, Christ; to die, gain, though then labor was over; such confidence in Christ's love to the assembly that he decides his case before Nero by what that love would produce. Envy and strife against himself leading some to preach Christ would only turn to victorious results for himself: he was content if Christ was preached. The superiority to the flesh, living above it so completely, was not that it was not there or its nature changed. He had, as we learn elsewhere, a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. But it is a glorious testimony to the power and working of the Spirit of God.

But this, too, produced its effects. The apostle desired that their joy should be full, and that unity among the Philippians should be perfect; for his absence had allowed some seeds of disunion and disaffection to germinate. Love had been sweetly and powerfully demonstrated by the gift they had sent to the apostle. Consolation in Christ, comfort of love, fellowship of the Spirit, tender mercies were displayed in it, giving him great joy. Let them then make this joy perfect by the full establishment of this same bond of love among themselves, by being of one accord, of one mind, having the same love for each other, being all like-minded, allowing

no rivalry or vain-glory to display itself in any way. Such was the apostle's desire. Appreciating their love towards himself, he wished their happiness to be complete through the perfecting of that love among themselves: thus would his own joy be perfect. Beautiful and touching affection! It was love in him which, sensible to their love, thought only of them. How delicate the way in which a kindness, which precluded reproof, made a way for what really was one, and which a heart that added charity to brotherly love could not leave unuttered!

Now the means of this union, of the maintenance of this love, was found in the abnegation of self, in humility, in the spirit that humbles itself in order to serve. It was this which perfectly displayed itself in Christ, in contrast with the first Adam. The latter sought to make himself like God by robbery, when he was in the form of a man, and strove to exalt himself at God's expense; being at the same time disobedient unto death. Christ, on the contrary, when He was in the form of God, emptied Himself, through love, of all His outward glory, of the form of God, and took the form of a man; and, even when He was in the form of a man, still humbled Himself. It was a second thing which He did in humbling Himself. As God, He emptied Himself; as man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross. God has highly exalted Him; for he who exalts himself shall be humbled? but he who humbles himself shall be exalted. Perfect love, glorious truth, precious obedience! A man by the just judgment and act of God is exalted to the right hand of the throne of the divine Majesty. What a truth is the Person of Christ! What a truth is this descent and ascension by which He fills all things as Redeemer and Lord of glory! God come down in love, man ascended in righteousness; entire love in coming down, entire obedience by love also. Worthy from all eternity as to His Person to be there, He is now as man exalted by God to His right hand. It is an act of righteousness on God's part that He is there; and our hearts can take part in it, rejoicing in His glory — rejoicing also that by grace we have part in it as to our own place.

His humiliation is a proof that He is God. God only could leave His first estate in the sovereign rights of His love; it is sin for any creature to do so. It is also a perfect love. But this proof is given, this love accomplished, in the fact that He is man. What a place has He acquired for us in Himself! But it is of Him, not of us who are its fruits, that the apostle thinks. He

rejoices in the thought of Christ's exaltation. God has exalted Him to the highest place, and given Him a name which is above every name, so that everything in heaven and earth, and even in infernal regions, must bow before this exalted man, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

It will be remarked here, that it is the lordship of Christ that is presented in this passage, not His divinity in itself. His divinity is indeed the primary point of departure. All in fact has its origin there — the love, the self-renunciation, the humiliation, the marvelous condescension. Nothing of all this could have been, or would have its value, without the former; but it is of the Lord, complete in His Person in the position which He took as man — it is of Him who humbled Himself, who when He had gone down to the lowest possible place, was exalted by God; it is of Jesus, who could, without exalting Himself, be equal with God, but who emptied Himself, who went down even into death, that the apostle speaks: of Jesus, Lord of all, and who, thus exalted as man, shall be owned as Lord throughout the whole creation to the glory of God the Father.\*

[\* Observe also, that it is not with regard to that which He suffered, as the effect of His submission to the will of God in the position which He took, that Christ is here presented as our pattern. It is in His voluntary humiliation, the fact that in love He took the last — the lowest-place, that we are called to follow Him. Love serves, love humbles itself — readily takes the meanest position (meanest according to the pride of man) in order to serve, and delights in it. Christ acted from love; He chose to serve. Christ chose to take the low place — He who was able to humble Himself — and we?

The apostle's heart enlarges whenever he speaks of the Lord Jesus; but he turns to the objects of his solicitude; and as he had spoken of the self-renunciation and the humiliation of Christ, as a means of union which would take all occasion from carnal rivalry, he has also been led to speak of the obedience of Christ in contrast with the first Adam and the flesh. He now applies this principle, also, for the instruction of the Philippians: "Wherefore," he says, "my beloved, as ye have always obeyed." And here the effect of his absence and removal from the work is introduced — not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for," he adds, "it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do." That is to say, while he was among them he had labored; now they were themselves engaged with the

enemy, without the aid of Paul's presence and spiritual energy; but God Himself wrought in them, and they ought to work so much the more earnestly in that they found themselves in such a warfare, God Himself being engaged for them as acting in them for this conflict, and they themselves striving in their own persons, directly with the power of the enemy. This was not the moment to boast in their little gifts, on account of the absence of that which had thrown them into the shade, nor to be at strife among themselves. On the other hand, if they were deprived of Paul, they were not deprived of God. God Himself wrought in them. This is the great principle, and the great consolation of the epistle. The Christians, deprived of the important aid of the apostle, are cast more immediately on God. The apostle himself, separated from the assembly, finds his own consolation in God; and commits the assembly in its lack of his personal care, to God Himself, in whom he had himself found this consolation.

It is to be carefully remarked here, that it is the very opposite of an exhortation to our own working in contrast with God's effectual power. "Your own" is in contrast with Paul in his absence, who had labored for them, because God did work in them to will and to do. They were to work, because, if Paul was absent, God wrought in them. I have noticed already that salvation, every blessing, is looked at everywhere in this epistle as at the end of the Christian's course, even the manifestation of their righteousness (chap. 3:9). This passage is an example. There are two ways the Christian is seen in the New Testament. In Christ — here is no progress, no question: he is accepted in Him — a complete, perfect, present state. But he is also a pilgrim upon earth, having to attain the goal: so always in Philippians. This gives occasion to every kind of exhortation, warning and "if." Thus he learns obedience and dependence — the two characteristics of the new man. But with this he is led to the sure infallible faithfulness of God to bring him through to the end, and bound to reckon on it. See 1 Corinthians 1:8, which I cite because they were going on very badly; but passages abound.

Diligence and earnestness ought to characterise the walk of Christians in these circumstances, in which immediate connection with God and personal conflict with the enemy have to be realised.

The apostle returns to the spirit of meekness and peace, in which the fruits of righteousness are sown. “Do all things,” he says, “without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life”: a very striking passage, because it will be found that in every member of the sentence it is an exact statement of what Christ was. Whatever may be the circumstances in which the assembly is found, such, as respects itself, should ever be its state and its walk. Grace sufficient for this is ever there in Christ.

Unity of spirit among themselves by grace, and a walk according to God, in order that they may be as heavenly lights amid the moral darkness of this world — always carrying, and thus holding forth, the word of life: such was the apostle’s desire. They would thus give proof by the constancy and practical effect of their faith, that the apostle had not run or labored in vain; and they would themselves be his glory in the day of Christ. Oh, if the assembly had continued such! Be that as it may, Christ will be glorified. The apostle thus unites his work and the reward in the day of Christ with the blessing of the assembly. He would not be separated from it in his death. This union of heart and faith is very touching. He presents himself as capable of being poured out (that is to say, his life) upon the sacrifice and service of the Philippians’ faith. They had shown their devotedness to Christ in thinking even of His servant; and he looks upon all their faith as an offering to the Savior and to God; looking at them, Christ’s people, as the substance of the offering, the great thing, himself only as a libation — his life poured out upon the offering. Perhaps his life would be poured out in the service of the gospel, to which they consecrated themselves on their part, and be a seal to this offering of theirs, which was dedicated to God by this sacred bond with the apostle. He rejoiced, if it were so, that his life was poured out: it would crown his work for the Gentiles. He desires too that they also in the same spirit should rejoice in the same thing. It was all one thing, their faith and his, and their common service, offered to God, and well-pleasing to Him; and the most exalted proof of it should be the source of the most sacred joy. This world was not the real scene of that which was going on: what we behold here in connection with the divine work is but the outside. The apostle speaks this language of faith, which ever sees things as before God.

Nevertheless his watchful care did not cease, although he committed the Philippians to God. It is always thus. The love and the faith which commit everything to God do not cease to think according to God of that which is dear to Him. Thus in 1 John, chapter 2, the apostle, while saying that the little children in Christ needed not that any one should teach them, yet instructs them with all tenderness and foresight. Here also the apostle, full of holy solicitude for these souls who were dear to Christ, hopes soon to send Timotheus that he may know their state. But the condition of things is evident. He sends Timotheus because he had no one else in whose heart the same feelings towards them flowed forth from the same spring of love. All sought their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. What an exercise for faith! But what an occasion for its exercise!

Still, with regard to Timotheus, these beloved Philippians should receive him with a heart that responded to the apostle's confidence. They knew how he had served Paul in the gospel. The bonds of love in the gospel are but the stronger — God be praised — when all grows cold. And observe, that God carried on His work, when as to the common testimony of the assembly, everything failed through a coldness which oppressed the apostle's heart; for God does not weary in His work. This bond however does not fail here with the Philippians either. As soon as Paul knew how it would go with himself, he would send Timotheus to them; but, as he had said, he had confidence in the Lord that he himself should come shortly.

But there was also Epaphroditus, who had come from the Philippians to carry their testimonial of affection to the apostle; and who, the faithful instrument and expression of their love, had risked his own life and suffered from dangerous sickness, in order to accomplish their service. This fine testimony of christian love breaks out here on every side. Epaphroditus so counts upon the love of the Philippians, that he is much troubled, because they had heard he was sick. He reckons on the feeling they had towards him — the place he had in their affections. Would it not be thus with an affectionate son, who knew that his mother had heard such tidings of him? He would hasten to inform her of his recovery, in order to tranquillise a heart whose love he knew. Such is christian affection, tender and simple, confiding, because pure and unsuspicious, and walking in the light of God — walking with Him and in the affections which Christ had consecrated as man. Divine love, no doubt, goes higher; but brotherly love,

which acts before men and as the fruit among men of that divine love, displays itself thus in grace.

The apostle responds to this affection of the Philippians for him who taught them and labored in the Lord for them (the Holy Ghost also remembers it here), and he sends back Epaphroditus, encouraging and seeking to sustain this feeling in the heart of the Philippians. He takes part in it himself, and brings into it God's own tender love. Paul would have had sorrow upon sorrow (and he had much already), if the Philippians had lost their beloved servant and messenger by means of the services he had rendered them; but God had spared Epaphroditus and the apostle himself. He would however have them assured of it by the presence of Epaphroditus again among them; and thus the apostle's own heart freed from all anxiety, would be also relieved. What a picture of mutual love and kind solicitude!

And observe the ways in which God, according to the apostle, takes part in it. What are presented to us here are His compassions, not the counsels of His love, but compassions worthy of God, and affections of which He approves among men. These affections and this value for laborers are sometimes feared; and so much the more so, because the assembly has in fact to disentangle itself from all false dependence on man. But it is in the entire failure of manifested strength and outward organised bond, through the apostle's absence, that the Spirit of God develops the play of these inward affections and bonds for the instruction of the assembly; as he acknowledges all that remains of the ruins of its primitive position and its outward bonds. He does not create these anew; but he acknowledges that which still exists. It is only the first verse of the epistle which speaks of this — no more was needed; but the inward bonds he develops largely, not as doctrine, but as fact. God Himself, the apostle, his faithful Timotheus, the valued servant of the Philippians, who was so dear to them, and the fellow-laborer of Paul, the servant of the Lord, the Philippians themselves, all have their part in this precious and beautiful chain of love. The graciousness of the christian life is thus developed in every part of this chapter; the delicacy of his reproof of the spirit of division; his sending Timothy when he can let them know how it went with him, but Epaphroditus at once because they had heard he had been sick. This graciousness, and consideration of others, note, connects itself with a

Christ who humbles Himself. A lowly Christ humbling Himself from Godhead-form down to death, is the spring of lowly graciousness; an exalted One sought in glory, the spring of energy which counts all to be dross and dung to win Him.

After all it was in the Lord Himself that they had to rejoice, and the apostle now puts them on their guard against that which had eaten away the life of the assembly, and produced the painful fruits that filled his heart with anguish, and the deplorable consequences of which we see at this day, even as he foretold — consequences which will yet ripen for the judgment of God. Be this as it may, the Lord does not change. “Rejoice,” he says, “in the Lord.” There all is sure.

That which might prevent their thus rejoicing is developed, as well as the true knowledge of Christ, which preserves us from it: not here according to the doctrine and the practice that belong to the high position of the assembly’s union with a glorified Christ as His body, nor according to the unity which flows from it. This is the subject of the Ephesians Neither is it according to the urgent necessity of cleaving to the Head, because all fullness is in Him. This is the instruction of the epistle to the Colossians. But, in accordance with the general character of the epistle, the subject is here treated in connection with the personal experiences of the Christian, and, in particular, of the apostle. Accordingly — as was seen in his personal combats and sorrow — he finds himself on the road to the full enjoyment of this object whom he has learnt to know, and the state which his heart desires. This ought to be the Christian’s experience, for, if I am united by the Spirit to the Head as a member of the body of Christ, and if by faith I apprehend this union, it is none the less true that my personal experience (although this faith is its basis) is necessarily in connection with the paths which I follow in order to reach the glory this entitles me to. Not that the sentiments awakened by that which I encounter on this path either falsify or contradict my position in Christ, or destroy the certainty of my starting-point. But, while possessing this certainty, and because I possess it, I know that I have not in fact reached the result of this position in glory. Now, in this epistle, we are on the road, we are individualised in our relations with God; for experience is always individual, although our union with each other as members of Christ forms a part of this experience.



In **CHAPTER 3** Paul resumes his exhortation; but it was not burdensome to him, and it was safe for them (danger being present and his tender love watchful), to renew his warnings and instructions respecting the admixture of Judaizing principles with the doctrine of a glorified Christ. It was in fact to destroy the latter and to reinstate the flesh (that is, sin and alienation from God) in its place. It was the first man, already rejected and condemned, and not the second Man. Yet it is not in the shape of sin that the flesh appears here, but in that of righteousness, of all that is respectable and religious, of ordinances which had the venerable weight of antiquity attached to them, and as to their origin, if all had not been done away in Christ, the authority of God Himself.

To the apostle, who knew Christ in heaven, all this was but a bait to draw the Christian away from Christ, and throw him back again into the ruin out of which Christ had drawn him. And this would be so much the worse, because it would be to abandon a known and glorified Christ, and to return to that which had been proved to be of no value through the flesh. The apostle therefore spares neither the doctrine nor those who taught it.

The glory which he had seen, his contests with these false teachers, the state into which they had thrown the assembly, Jerusalem and Rome, his liberty and his prison — all, had gained him the experience of what Judaism was worth as to the assembly of God. They were dogs, evil workers, that is workers of malice and wickedness. It was not the circumcision. He treats it with profound contempt, and uses language, the harshness of which is justified by his love for the assembly; for love is severe towards those who, devoid of conscience, corrupt the object of that love. It was the concision.

When evil without shame, and laboring to produce evil under a disgraceful veil of religion, is manifested in its true character, mildness is a crime against the objects of the love of Christ. If we love Him, we shall in our intercourse with the assembly give the evil its true character, which it seeks to hide. This is real love and faithfulness to Christ. The apostle had certainly not failed in condescension to the weak in this respect. He had carried it far; his prison testified it. And now the assembly, deprived of his energy and that spiritual decision which was full of love to all which is good, was more in danger than ever. The experience of a whole life of

activity, of the greatest patience, of four years' reflection in prison, led to these forcible and urgent words, "Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision." The doctrine of the epistle to the Ephesians, the exhortation of that to the Colossians, the affection of that to these Philippians, with the denunciation contained in chapter 3:2, date from the same epoch, and are marked with the same love.

But it sufficed to denounce them. Elsewhere, where they were not well known, he gave details, as in the case of Timotheus, who had still to watch over the assembly. It was sufficient now to point out their well-known character. Whatever Judaised, whatever sought to mingle law and gospel, trusting in ordinances and the Spirit, was shameless, malicious, and contemptible. But the apostle will rather occupy himself with the power that delivers from it. We are the circumcision (that which is really separate from the evil, that which is dead to sin and to the flesh), we who worship God, not in the false pretension of ordinances, but spiritually by the power of the Holy Ghost, who rejoice in Christ the Savior and not in the flesh, but on the contrary have no confidence in it. We see here Christ and the Spirit in contrast with the flesh and self.

Paul might indeed boast, if needful, in that which belonged to the flesh. As to all Jewish privileges, he possessed them in the highest degree. He had outstript every one in holy zeal against innovators. One thing alone had changed it all — he had seen a glorified Christ. All that he had according to the flesh was thenceforth loss to him. It would place something between him and the Christ of his faith and of his desire — the Christ whom he knew. And, observe, that here it is not the sins of the flesh which Christ expiates and abolishes that he rejects; it is its righteousness. It has none, we may say; but even if the apostle had possessed any righteousness of the flesh — as, in fact, he did possess it outwardly — he would not have it, because he had seen a better. In Christ, who had appeared to him on the way to Damascus, he had seen divine righteousness for man, and divine glory in man. He had seen a glorified Christ, who acknowledged the poor feeble members of the assembly as a part of Himself. He would have nothing else. The excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord had eclipsed everything — changed everything which was not that into loss. The stars, as well as the darkness of night, disappear before the sun. The righteousness of the law, the righteousness of Paul, all that distinguished

him among men, disappeared before the righteousness of God and the glory of Christ.

It was a thorough change in his whole moral being. His gain was now loss to him. Christ was become all. It was not evil which disappeared — everything that belonged to Paul as advantage to the flesh disappeared. It was another who was now precious to him. What a deep and radical change in the whole moral being of man, when he ceases to be the center of his own importance; and another, a worthy of being so, becomes the center of his moral existence! — a divine person, a man who had glorified God, a man in whom the glory of God shone out, to the eye of faith; in whom His righteousness was realised, His love, His tender mercy, perfectly revealed towards men and known by men. This was He whom Paul desired to win, to possess — for here we are still in the paths of the wilderness — he desired to be found in Him: “That I may win Christ, and be found in him.” Two things were present to his faith in this desire: to have the righteousness of God Himself as his (in Christ he should possess it); and then, to know Him and the power of His resurrection — for he only knew Him as risen — and, according to that power working in him now, to have part in the sufferings of Christ, and be made conformable to His death.

It was in His death that perfect love had been demonstrated, that the perfect ground of divine and eternal righteousness had been laid, that self-renunciation was practically, entirely, perfectly, manifested in Christ, the perfect object to the apostle of a faith that apprehended it and desired it according to the new man. Christ had passed through death in the perfection of that life, the power of which was manifested in resurrection.

Paul, having seen this perfection in glory, and being united (weak as he was in himself) to Christ the source of this power, desired to know the power of His resurrection, that he might follow Him in His sufferings.

Circumstances held this as a reality before his eyes. His heart only saw, or wished to see, Christ, that he might follow Him there. If death was on the way, he was only so much the more like Christ. He did not mind what it cost, if by any means he might attain. This gave undivided energy of purpose. This is indeed to know Him, as completely put to the test, and thus to know all that He was, His perfection — of love, of obedience, of devotedness — fully manifested; but the object is to win Him as He is.

Having seen Him in the glory, the apostle understood the path which had led Him there, and the perfection of Christ in that path. Participating in His life, he desired to realise its power according to His glory, that he might follow Him, in order to be where Jesus was, and in the glory with Him. This is what the Lord said in John 12:23-26. Who had apprehended Him like Paul by the grace of God? Observe here the difference between him and Peter. Peter calls himself “a witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed”; Paul, a witness of the glory as it is in heaven (“as he is,” as John says), desires to share his sufferings. It is the special foundation of the assembly’s place, of walking in the Spirit, according to the revelation of the glory of Christ. It is this, I doubt not, which makes Peter say, that in all Paul’s epistles — which he acknowledges moreover as a part of the scriptures — there are some things hard to be understood. It took man clean out of the whole ancient order of things.

Having then seen Christ in glory, there were two things for Paul — the righteousness of God in Christ, and the knowledge of Christ. The first entirely eclipsed everything of which the flesh could boast. This was “mine own,” the righteousness of man according to the law. The other was the righteousness of God, which is by faith; that is, man is nothing in it. It is God’s righteousness: man has part in it by believing, that is to say, by faith in Christ Jesus. The believer has his place before God in Christ, in the righteousness of God Himself, which He had manifested in glorifying Christ, having glorified Himself in Him. What a position! not only sin, but human righteousness, all that is of self, excluded; our place being according to the perfection in which Christ, as man, has perfectly glorified God. But this place is necessarily the place of Him who has accomplished this glorious work. Christ, in His Person and in His present position,\* is the expression of our place: to know Him is to know it. He is there according to divine righteousness. To be there, as He is, is that into which divine righteousness freely, but necessarily, introduces man — introduces us — in Christ. Thenceforth, having seen the righteousness of God in that Christ is there, I desire myself to know what it is to be there: and I desire to know Christ. But in truth this embraces all that He was in accomplishing it. The glory reveals the power and the result. That which He suffered is the work in which He glorified God; so that divine righteousness has been

fulfilled in His exaltation, as man, to divine glory. And here divine love, perfect devotedness to His Father's glory, constant and perfect obedience, the endurance of all things in order to give testimony of His Father's love for men, perfect patience, unfathomable sufferings, in order that love might be both possible and perfect for sinners — all in short that Christ was, being connected with His Person, makes Him an object which commands, possesses, delivers, and strengthens the heart, by the power of His grace acting in the new life, in which we are united to Him by the all-powerful link of the Spirit, and causes Him to be the alone object before our eyes.

[\* Not, of course, as to being at the right hand of God — this was personal.]

Accordingly Paul desires to have that which Christ can give, His cup, and His baptism; and to leave to the Father, that which Christ left to Him, the disposal of places in the kingdom. He does not desire, like John and James, the right and left hand, that is, a good place for himself. He desires Christ, he would win Christ. He does not follow tremblingly, as the disciples did in that chapter (Mark 10); he desires to suffer — not, that is, for the sake of suffering, but to have part in the sufferings of Christ. Instead therefore of going away like the young man in the same chapter, because he had much that could profit the flesh, instead of clinging like him to the law for his righteousness, he renounces that righteousness which he had in common with the young man; and all that he had he counted but as dung.

Here then we have the practical personal experience of the operation of this great principle, which the apostle has set forth in other epistles, that we have part with a glorified Christ. Also, in telling of the result as to himself, he speaks of his own resurrection according to the character of Christ's. It is not that of which Peter speaks, as we have seen, the simply participating in the glory that was to be revealed. It is that which precedes. Having seen Christ in the glory, according to the power of His resurrection, he desires to participate in that: and this is the force of his word, "if by any means." He desired to have part in the resurrection from among the dead. If, in order to reach it, it was needful to pass through death (as Christ had done), he would go through it, cost what it might, be it in ever so painful a way — and death was at that time before his eyes with its human terror: he desired fully to take part with Christ.

Now it is the character of this resurrection that it is from among the dead; it is not simply the resurrection of the dead. It is to come out, by the favor and the power of God (as it regards Christ, and indeed us too by Him, by the righteousness of God), from the condition of evil into which sin had plunged men — to come out, after having been dead in sins, and now to sin, through the favor and power and righteousness of God. What grace! and what a difference! By following Christ according to the will of God, in the place where He has set us (and to be content with the lowest place, if God has given it us, is the same renunciation of self as to labor in the highest — the secret of each is, that Christ is everything and ourselves nothing), we participate in His resurrection — a thought full of peace and joy, and which fills the heart with love to Christ. Joyful and glorious hope, which shines before our eyes in Christ, and in that blessed Savior glorified! The objects of divine favor in Him, we come forth — because the eye of God is upon us, because we are His — from the house of death, which cannot detain those who are His, because the glory and the love of God are concerned in them. Christ is the example and the pattern of our resurrection; the principle (Romans 8) and the assurance of our resurrection is in Him. The road to it is that which the apostle here traces.

But since resurrection and likeness to Christ in glory were the objects of his hope, it is very evident that he had not attained it. If that was his perfection, he could not be yet perfect. He was, as has been said, on the road; but Christ had apprehended him for it, and he still pressed onward to lay hold of the prize, for the enjoyment of which Christ had laid hold of him. No, he repeats to his brethren, I count not myself to have attained. But one thing at least he could say — he forgot all that was behind him, and pressed on ever towards the goal, keeping it always in sight to obtain the prize of the calling of God, which is found in heaven. Happy Christian! It is a great thing never to lose sight of it, never to have a divided heart, to think but of one thing; to act, to think, always according to the positive energy wrought by the Holy Ghost in the new man, directing him to this only and heavenly object. It is not his sins properly which he here says he forgot — it was his progress that he forgot, his advantages, all that was already behind. And this was not merely the energy that showed itself at the first impulse; he still counted everything but as dung, because he had still Christ in view. This is true christian life. What a sad moment would it

have been for Rebecca, if, in the midst of the desert with Eliezer, she had forgotten Isaac, and begun to think again of Bethuel and her father's house! What had she then in the desert with Eliezer?

Such is the true life and position of the Christian; even as the Israelites, although preserved by the blood from the messenger of judgment, were not in their true place till they were on the other side of the Red Sea, a freed people. Then he is on the road to Canaan, as belonging to God.

The Christian, until he understands this new position which Christ has taken as risen from the dead, is not spiritually in its true place, is not perfect or full-grown in Christ. But when he has attained this, it is not assuredly that he is to despise others. "If," says the apostle, "they were otherwise minded, God would reveal" to them the fullness of His truth; and all were to walk together with one mind in the things to which they had attained. Where the eye was single, it would be so: there were many with whom this was not the case; but the apostle was their example. This was saying much. While Jesus lived the peculiar power of this resurrection life could not be revealed in the same way; and moreover while on earth Christ walked in the consciousness of that which He was with His Father before the world existed, so that, although He endured for the joy that was set before Him, although His life was the perfect pattern of the heavenly man, there was in Him a repose, a communion, which had quite a peculiar character; instructive nevertheless to us, because the Father loves us as He loved Jesus, and Jesus also loves us as the Father loved Him. With Him it was not the energy of one who must run the race in order to attain that which he has never yet possessed; He spoke of that which He knew, and bore witness of that which He had seen, of that which He had forsaken from love to us, the Son of man who is in heaven.

John enters farther into this character of Christ: in his epistle therefore we find more of that which He is in His nature and character, than of what we shall be with Him in the glory. Peter, building on the same foundation as the others, waits however for that which shall be revealed. His pilgrimage was indeed towards heaven, to obtain a treasure which was preserved there, which shall be revealed in the last time; but it is more connected with that which had been already revealed. From his point of view, the morning star on which Paul lived appeared only on the extreme horizon. For him

practical life was that of Jesus among the Jews. He could not say with Paul, "Be ye followers of me." The effect of the revelation of the heavenly glory of Christ, between His going away and His reappearance, and that of the union of all Christians to Him in heaven, was fully realised in him only who received it. Faithful through grace to this revelation, having no other object which guided his steps, or to divide his heart, he gives himself as an example. He truly followed Christ, but the form of his life was peculiar, on account of the way in which God had called him; and it is thus that Christians possessing this revelation ought to walk.

Accordingly Paul speaks of a dispensation committed to him.

It was not to turn their eyes from Christ; it is on having the eyes constantly fixed upon Him that he insists. It was this which characterised the apostle, and in this he gives himself as an example. But the character of this looking to Jesus was special. It was not a Christ known on earth who was its object, but a Christ glorified whom he had seen in heaven. To press ever forward to this end formed the character of his life; even as this same glory of Christ, as a testimony to the bringing in divine righteousness and to the assembly's position, formed the basis of his teaching. Therefore he can say, "Be followers of me." His gaze was ever fixed on the heavenly Christ, who had shone before his eyes and still shone before his faith. The Philippians were thus to walk together, and to mark those who followed the apostle's example; because (for evidently it was a period in which the assembly as a whole had much departed from her first love and her normal condition) there were many who, while bearing the name of Christ and having once given good hope, so that the apostle speaks of them with tears, were enemies of the cross of Christ. For the cross on earth, in our life, answers to the heavenly glory on high. It is not the assembly at Philippi which is the subject here, but the condition of the outward universal assembly. Many were already calling themselves Christians, who joined to that great name a life which had the earth and earthly things for its object. The apostle did not acknowledge them. They were there; it was not a matter of local discipline, but a condition of Christianity, in which even all were seeking their own interest; and, spirituality being thus lowered, the Christ of glory little realised, many who had no life at all might walk among them without being detected, by those who had so little life themselves and scarcely walked better than they did. For it does not



appear that they who were minding earthly things committed any evil that required public discipline. The general low tone of spirituality among the real Christians left the others free to walk with them; and the presence of the latter debased Still more the standard of godliness of life.

But this state of things did not escape the spiritual eye of the apostle, which, fixed on the glory, discerned readily and clearly all that had not that glory for its motive; and the Spirit has given us the divine judgment, most grave and solemn, with regard to this state of things. No doubt it has grown enormously worse since then, and its elements have developed and established themselves in a manner and in proportions that are very differently characterised; but the moral principles with regard to walk remain ever the same for the assembly. The same evil is present to be avoided, and the same efficacious means for avoiding it. There is the same blessed example to follow, the same heavenly Savior to be the glorious object of our faith, the same life to live if we desire to be Christians indeed.

That which characterised these persons who professed the name of Christ was, that their hearts were set upon earthly things. Thus the cross had not its practical power — it would have been a contradiction. Their end therefore was destruction. The true Christian was not such; his conversation was in heaven and not on the earth; his moral life was spent in heaven, his true relationships were there. From thence he expected Christ as a Savior, that is to say, to deliver him from the earth, from this earthly system far from God here below For salvation is always viewed in this epistle as the final result of the conflict, the result due to the almighty power of the Lord. Then, when Christ shall come to take the assembly to Himself — Christians, truly heavenly, shall be like Him in His heavenly glory, a likeness which is the object of their pursuit at all times (compare 1 John 3:2). Christ will accomplish it in them, conforming their bodies of humiliation to His glorious body according to the power whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself. Then the apostle and all Christians will have attained the end, the resurrection from among the dead.

Such is the tenor of this chapter. Christ, seen in glory, is the spring of energy to christian life, to win Christ, so that all else is loss; as Christ making Himself of no reputation is the spring of christian graciousness of walk: the two parts of christian life which we are too apt to sacrifice one

to another or at least to pursue one forgetful of the other. In both Paul singularly shines. In the following chapter we have superiority to circumstances. This also is Paul's experience and state; for it will be remarked that it is the personal experience of Paul which runs all through his (humanly speaking) faultless experience — not perfection. Likeness to Christ in glory is the only standard of that. As to this third chapter, many have inquired whether the thing aimed at was a spiritual assimilation to Christ here, or a complete assimilation to Him in the glory. This is rather to forget the import of what the apostle says, namely, that the sight and the desire of the heavenly glory, the desire of possessing Christ Himself thus glorified, was that which formed the heart here below. An object here below to be attained in oneself could not be found, since Christ is on high; it would be to separate the heart from the object which forms it to its own likeness. But although we never reach the mark here below, since it is a glorified Christ and resurrection from among the dead, yet its pursuit assimilates us more and more to Him. The object in the glory forms the life which answers to it here below. Were a light at the end of a long straight alley, I never have the light itself till I am arrived there; but I have ever increasing light in proportion as I go forward; I know it better; I am more in the light myself. Thus it is with a glorified Christ, and such is christian life (compare 2 Corinthians 3).

The Philippians were therefore to stand fast in the Lord. This is difficult when the general tone is lowered; painful also, for one's walk becomes much more solitary, and the hearts of others are straitened. But the Spirit has very plainly given us the example, the principle, the character, and the strength of this walk. With the eye on Christ all is easy; and communion with Him gives light and certainty; and is worth all the rest which perhaps we lose.

The apostle nevertheless spoke gently of those persons. They were not like the false judaising teachers who corrupted the sources of life, and stopped up the path of communion with God in love. They had lost this life of communion, or had never had more than the appearance of it. He wept for them.

I think that the apostle sent his letter by Epaphroditus, who probably also wrote it from the apostle's dictation; as was done with regard to all the

epistles, except that to the Galatians, which, as he tells us, he wrote with his own hand. When therefore he says (chap. 4:3), “true or faithful] yokefellow,” he speaks as I think, of Epaphroditus, and addresses him.

But he notices also two sisters even, who were not of one mind in resisting the enemy. In every way he desired unity of heart and mind. He entreats Epaphroditus (if indeed it be he) as the Lord’s servant to help those faithful women who had labored in concert with Paul to spread the gospel. Euodias and Syntyche were perhaps of the number — the connection of thought makes it probable. Their activity, having gone beyond the measure of their spiritual life, betrayed them into an exercise of self-will which set them at variance. Nevertheless they were not forgotten, together with Clement and others, who were fellow-laborers with the apostle himself, whose names were in the book of life. For love for the Lord remembers all that His grace does; and this grace has a place for each of His own.

The apostle returns to the practical exhortations addressed to the faithful, with regard to their ordinary life, that they might walk according to their heavenly calling. “Rejoice in the Lord.” If he even weeps over many who call themselves Christians, he rejoices always in the Lord; in Him is that which nothing can alter. This is not an indifference to sorrow which hinders weeping, but it is a spring of joy which enlarges when there is distress, because of its immutability, and which becomes even more pure in the heart the more it becomes the only one; and it is in itself the only spring that is infinitely pure. When it is our only spring, we thereby love others. If we love them besides Him, we lose something of Him. When through exercise of heart we are weaned from all other springs, His joy remains in all its purity, and our concern for others partakes of this same purity. Nothing moreover troubles this joy, because Christ never changes. The better we know Him, the better are we able to enjoy that which is ever enlarging through knowing Him. But he exhorts Christians to rejoice: it is a testimony to the worth of Christ, it is their true portion. Four years in prison chained to a soldier had not hindered his doing it, nor being able to exhort others more at ease than he.

Now this same thing will make them moderate and meek; their passions will not be excited by other things if Christ is enjoyed. Moreover He is at hand. A little while, and all for which men strive will give place to Him

whose presence bridles the will (or rather puts it aside) and fills the heart. We are not to be moved by things here below until He shall come. When He comes, we shall be fully occupied with other things.

Not only are the will and the passions to be bridled and silenced, but anxieties also. We are in relationship with God; in all things He is our refuge; and events do not disturb Him. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows everything, He knows it beforehand; events shake neither His throne, nor His heart; they always accomplish His purposes. But to us He is love; we are through grace the objects of His tender care. He listens to us and bows down His ear to hear us. In all things therefore, instead of disquieting ourselves and weighing everything in our own hearts, we ought to present our requests to God with prayer, with supplication, with a heart that makes itself known (for we are human beings) but with the knowledge of the heart of God (for He loves us perfectly); so that, even while making our petition to Him, we can already give thanks, because we are sure of the answer of His grace, be it what it may; and it is our requests that we are to present to Him. Nor is it a cold commandment to find out His will and then come: we are to go with our requests. Hence it does not say, you will have what you ask; but God's peace will keep your hearts. This is trust; and His peace, the peace of God Himself, shall keep our hearts. It does not say that our hearts shall keep the peace of God; but, having cast our burden on Him whose peace nothing can disturb, His peace keeps our hearts. Our trouble is before Him, and the constant peace of the God of love, who takes charge of everything and knows all beforehand, quiets our disburdened hearts, and imparts to us the peace which is in Himself and which is above all understanding (or at least keeps our hearts by it), even as He Himself is above all the circumstances that can disquiet us, and above the poor human heart that is troubled by them. Oh, what grace! that even our anxieties are a means of our being filled with this marvelous peace, if we know how to bring them to God, and true He is. May we learn indeed how to maintain this intercourse with God and its reality, in order that we may converse with Him and understand His ways with believers!

Moreover, the Christian, although walking (as we have seen) in the midst of evil and of trial, is to occupy himself with all that is good, and is able to do it when thus at peace, to live in this atmosphere, so that it shall pervade

his heart, that he shall be habitually where God is to be found. This is an all-important command. We may be occupied with evil in order to condemn it; we may be right, but this is not communion with God in that which is good. But if occupied through His grace with that which is good, with that which comes from Himself, the God of peace is with us. In trouble we shall have the peace of God; in our ordinary life, if it be of this nature, we shall have the God of peace. Paul was the practical example of this; with regard to their walk, by following him in that which they had learnt and heard from him and seen in him, they should find that God was with them.

Nevertheless, although such was his experience, he rejoiced greatly that their loving care of him had flourished again. He could indeed take refuge in God; but it was sweet to him in the Lord to have this testimony on their part. It is evident that he had been in need; but it was the occasion of more entire trust in God. We can easily gather this from his language; but, he delicately adds, he would not, by saying that their care of him had now at last flourished again, imply that they had forgotten him. The care for him was in their hearts; but they had not had the opportunity of giving expression to their love. Neither did he speak in regard of want; he had learnt — for it is practical experience and its blessed result we find hereto be content under all circumstances, and thus to depend on no one. He knew how to be abased: he knew how to abound; in every way he was instructed both to be full and to be hungry, to be in abundance and to suffer want. He could do all things through Him who strengthened him. Sweet and precious experience! not only because it gives ability to meet all circumstances, which is of great price, but because the Lord is known, the constant, faithful, mighty friend of the heart. It is not ‘I can do all things,’ but “I can do all through him who strengtheneth me.” It is a strength which continually flows from a relationship with Christ, a connection with Him maintained in the heart. Neither is it only ‘One can do all things.’ This is true; but Paul had learnt it practically. He knew what he could be assured of and reckon on — what ground he stood on. Christ had always been faithful to him, had brought him through so many difficulties and through so many seasons of prosperity, that he had learnt to trust in Him, and not in circumstances. And Christ was the same ever. Still the Philippians had done well, and it was not forgotten. From the first God had bestowed this

grace upon them, and they had supplied the apostle's need, even when he was not with them. He remembered it with affection, not that he desired a gift, but fruit to their own account. "But," he says, "I have all," his heart turning back to the simple expression of his love He was in abundance, having received by Epaphroditus that which they had sent him, an acceptable sacrifice of sweet odour, well-pleasing to God.

His heart rested in God; his assurance with regard to the Philippians expresses it. My God, he says, shall richly supply all your need. He does not express a wish that God may do so. He had learnt what his God was by his own experience. My God, he says, He whom I have learnt to know in all the circumstances through which I have passed, shall fill you with all good things. And here he returns to His character as he had known Him. God would do it according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. There he had learnt to know Him at the beginning; and such he had known Him all along his varied path, so full of trials here and of joys from above. Accordingly he thus concludes: "Now unto our God and Father" — for such He was to the Philippians also — "be glory for ever and ever." He applies his own experience of that which God was to him, and his experience of the faithfulness of Christ, to the Philippians. This satisfied his love, and gave him rest with regard to them. It is a comfort when we think of the assembly of God.

He sends the greeting of the brethren who were with him, and of the saints in general, especially those of Caesar's household; for even there God had found some who through grace had listened to His voice of love.

He ends with the salutation which was a token in all his epistles that they were from himself.

The present state of the assembly, of the children of God, dispersed anew, and often as sheep without a shepherd, is a very different condition of ruin from that in which the apostle wrote; but this only adds more value to the experience of the apostle which God has been pleased to give us; the experience of a heart which trusted in God alone, and which applies this experience to the condition of those who are deprived of the natural resources that belonged to the organised body, to the body of Christ as God had formed it on earth. As a whole, the epistle shows proper christian experience, that is, superiority, as walking in the Spirit, to everything

through which we have to pass. It is remarkable to see that sin is not mentioned in it, nor flesh, save to say he had no confidence in it.

He had at this time a thorn in the flesh himself, but the proper experience of the Christian is walking in the Spirit above and out of the reach of all that may bring the flesh into activity.

The reader will remark that chapter 3 sets the glory before the Christian and gives the energy of christian life; chapter 2, the self-emptying and abasement of Christ, and founds thereon the graciousness of the christian life, and thoughtfulness of others: while the last chapter gives a blessed superiority to all circumstances.

## COLOSSIANS

The epistle to the Colossians looks at the Christian as risen with Christ, but not, as in that to the Ephesians, as sitting in heavenly places in Christ. A hope is laid up for him in heaven; he is to set his affections on things above, not on things on the earth. He has died with Christ and he is risen with Him, but not sitting in heavenly places in Him yet. We have in it a proof of that which other epistles demonstrate, namely, the blessed way in which our God in His grace turns everything to the good of those that love Him.

In the epistle to the Ephesians the Holy Ghost had developed the counsels of God with regard to the church — its privileges. The Christians of Ephesus had nothing to be reproached with: \* therefore the Holy Ghost could use the occasion furnished by that faithful flock to unfold all the privileges which God had ordained for the church at large, by virtue of its union with Jesus Christ its Head, as well as the individual privileges of the children of God.

[\* How painful it is to see this beloved church taken afterwards as an example of the first love being lost! But all tends to the end.]

It was not so with the Colossians. They had in some measure slipped away from this blessed portion, and lost the sense of their union with the Head of the body; at least, if it was not actually so, they were assailed by the danger, and liable to the influence of those who sought to draw them away from it, and subject them to the influence of philosophy and Judaism, so that the apostle had to occupy himself with the danger, and not merely with their privileges. This union with our Head thank God! cannot itself be lost; but as a truth in the church, or of realisation by individuals, it may. We know this but too well in the church of the day we live in. This however gives occasion to the Spirit of God to develop all the riches and all the perfection which are found in the Head and in His work, in order to recover the members of the body from their spiritual feebleness, or maintain them in the full practical enjoyment of their union with Christ, and in the power of the position gained for them by that union. For us this is abiding instruction with regard to the riches that are in the Head.



2 If the epistle to the Ephesians delineates the privileges of the body, that to the Colossians reveals the fullness that is in the Head, and our completeness in Him. Thus in that to the Ephesians the church is the fullness of Him who filleth all in all; in that to the Colossians, all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ bodily, and we are complete in Him. There is another difference however, which it is important to remark. In the epistle to the Colossians we do not — save in the expression, “love in the Spirit” — find any mention of the Holy Ghost. He is fully brought forward in the Ephesians But on the other hand, we have Christ as our life far more fully developed, of equal importance in its place. In Ephesians we have more largely the contrast of heathenism with christian privilege and state. The formation of the soul in living likeness to Christ is largely developed in Colossians. It is more, in the well-known expressions, Christ in us than we in Christ, though these cannot be separated. A further important difference is that in Ephesians the unity of Jew and Gentile in one body holds a large place. In Colossians the Gentiles only are in view, though in connection with the doctrine of the body. These differences well noted, we may say that the two epistles have a great resemblance in their general character.

They commence in nearly the same way.\* Both are written from Rome, while the apostle was a prisoner in that city, and sent by the same messenger and on the same occasion, as well probably as that to Philemon: so the names and salutations give us reason to believe. The address to the Ephesians places them perhaps more immediately in connection with God Himself, instead of presenting them as in brotherly communion on earth. They are not called brethren in Ephesians 1:1, only saints and faithful in Christ Jesus. They are viewed as walking on earth in Colossians, though risen. Hence there is a long prayer for their walk, though on high and holy ground as delivered. In Ephesians it begins with the full purpose and fruit of God’s counsels. In that epistle the apostle’s heart expands at once in the sense of the blessings enjoyed by the Ephesians They were blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ. For the Colossians there was a hope laid up in heaven. And there is a preface of many verses referring to the gospel they had heard, and introducing his prayer for their walk and state down here. This brings us where Ephesians 1:7 brings us, but with a much more enlarged development of the personal

glory of Christ, and more in an historical way of God's actual dealings. It is also a more personal church address than the Ephesians

[\* The name of Timotheus is not found in the address to the saints at Ephesus.]

3 But let us consider more closely that which is said to the Colossians. The blessed calling of which the apostle speaks (Ephesians 1:3-10), and the privileges of the inheritance (11-14), are wanting in Colossians; risen but on earth, they are not sitting in heavenly places, all things being thus their inheritance. It is not they in Christ there, but Christ in them the hope of glory, and the prayer referred to above fills up the chapter till we come to the common ground of Christ's glory in Colossians 1:15; and even here the divine glory of Christ is brought out in Colossians, the simple fact of the purpose of God as to Christ in Ephesians. And not only we have not God's inheritance ours; but in Colossians the Spirit as earnest of it is not spoken of. This indeed we have seen is characteristic of Colossians. The Spirit is not spoken of, but life. We have the Person and divine glory of Christ, and our completeness in Him, more insisted on in Colossians; but not the saints' place with God in the same way. Further, as the saint is looked at as on earth, not in Christ on high, his responsibility is brought in (chap. 1:23). Colossians 1:3 answers to Ephesians 1:16: only one feels that there is more fullness in the joy of Ephesians 1:16. Faith in Christ and love to all saints are found in each exordium, as the occasion of the writer's joy.

The subject of his prayer is quite different. In the Ephesians, where he develops the counsels of God with regard to the church, he prays that the saints may understand them, as well as the power by means of which they participated in them. Here he prays that their walk may be guided by divine intelligence. But this belongs to another cause, to the point of view from which, in his discourse, he looks at the saints. We have seen that in the epistle to the Ephesians, he views them as sitting in the heavenlies. Their inheritance consequently is that of all things which are to be gathered together under Christ as Head. Here he prays for them in view of a hope laid up for them in heaven; his prayer therefore refers to their walk, that it may be in harmony with the object which they had set before them. As on earth and in danger of not adhering to the Head, the believers in Colosse were in danger of departing from that object. He prayed therefore in view

of that heavenly hope. They had heard of this perfect and glorious hope. The gospel had proclaimed it everywhere.

4 It was this gospel preached in view of a hope laid up in heaven which had produced fruit among men, fruit that was characterised by its heavenly source. Their religion, that which governed their heart in these relationships with God, was heavenly. The Colossians were in danger of falling back into the current of ordinances, and of the religious customs of man living in the world, whose religion was in connection with the world in which he dwelt, and not enlightened, not filled with heavenly light. There is nothing but conscious union with Christ which can keep us securely there. Ordinances to reach Him can have no place where we are united to Him; the philosophy of human thoughts none, where we possess livingly divine ones in Christ.

Nevertheless how precious it is — even if we are not in the full height of our calling — to have an object set before our hearts which delivers us from this world, and from the influences which hide God from us! Such is the apostle's object in this scripture. He directs the eyes of the Colossians to heaven, in order that they may see Christ there, and regain that sense of their union with the Head which they had in some measure lost, or were in danger of losing. The groundwork was however there — faith in Christ and love to all saints. They only needed realising their union with the Head; which moreover could alone maintain them in the heavenly element above ordinances, above human and earthly religion.

The apostle, in order to raise them up, sets out as usual from the point where he found good in the saints to whom he wrote. This heavenly hope had reached them and had produced fruit. It is this which distinguishes Christianity from all other religions, and in particular from the Jewish system, which — although individuals who were in it by grace sighed for heaven — hid God behind the veil, and enveloped the conscience in a series of ordinances at a distance from Him.

Now, based upon this hope which placed the inner life of the Christians in connection with heaven, the apostle prays that the Colossians may be filled with the knowledge of the will God in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. It is the fruit of a risen man's connection with God on the earth. This is very different from commandments and ordinances. It is the

fruit of intimate communion with God, of knowledge of His character and of His nature by virtue of this communion; and, although it refers to practical life, as belonging to the inner life, it leaves ordinances completely behind. The apostle had to begin at this practical end, at christian life. Perhaps the Colossians did not at first understand the bearing of these instructions, but they contained a principle which, already planted in their heart and capable of being re-awakened, led them to the point which the apostle aimed at, and was at the same time a very precious privilege, the value of which they were in a position to apprehend. Such is charity. The apostle develops their privileges in this respect with force and clearness, as one to whom such a walk was well known, and moreover with the power of the Spirit of God. They are not in heaven but on earth, and this is the path that suited those risen with Christ and looking to heaven from the earth. It is divine life on earth, not the Holy Ghost putting the soul of the believer at the center of divine counsels, as in Ephesians 3 through Christ dwelling in the heart by faith.

5 The first principle of this practical heavenly life was the knowledge of the will of God — to be filled with it, not to run after it as a thing without us, nor in indecision, in uncertainty, as to what it was, but to be filled with it by a principle of intelligence which comes from Him, and which forms the understanding and the wisdom of the Christian himself. The character of God was livingly translated in the appreciation of everything that the Christian did. And remark here that the knowledge of God's will is based on the spiritual state of the soul — wisdom and spiritual understanding. And this is of all practical importance. No particular direction by man as to conduct meets this at all — rather saves us from the need of spiritual understanding. No doubt a more spiritual mind may help me in the discernment of God's will;\* but God has connected the discovery of the path of His will, His way, with the inward state of the soul, and causes us to pass through circumstances — human life here below — to test and to discover to ourselves what that state is, and to exercise us therein. The Christian has by his spiritual state to know God's ways. The word is the means (compare John 17:17, 19). God has a way of His own which the vulture's eye hath not seen, known only to the spiritual man, connected with, flowing from, and to, the knowledge of God (compare Exodus 33:13). Thus the Christian walks worthy of the Lord; he knows what

becomes Him,\*\* and walks accordingly, that he may please Him in all things, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing by the knowledge of God.

[\* It is one of the deceits of the heart that, when we really know God's will quite well, we go to ask advice of one no more spiritual than ourselves.]

[\*\* There are three measures given of the Christian's walk in this form: worthy of God who has called us to His own kingdom and glory; worthy of the Lord, here; and worthy of the vocation with which we are called, that is, the Holy Ghost dwelling in the church, Ephesians 2; developed as it is in the end of chapter 3.]

6 It was not then only the character of life: this life was productive; it bore fruit, and, as life grew up, by increasing knowledge of God. But this connection with God brings in another very precious consideration. Besides the character and the living energy which are in relationship with this knowledge, the strength of the Lord\* is developed in it also. They draw strength from Him. He gives it that they might walk thus. "Strengthened," he says, "with all power, according to the might of his glory." Such is the measure of the Christian's strength for a life in harmony with the character of God. Thus the character of this life is revealed in the heavenly glory on high — Jesus Christ. On earth its manifestation — as it had been in Jesus Christ — is realised in all patience and longsuffering with joy, in the midst of the sorrow and afflictions of the life of God in this world. This form of the life too is striking: all divine strength according to His glory given in order to be patient, to endure. What a character it gives to the Christian's life in this world! And there is a generous bearing with others which it enables us to maintain. Nor is anything a more manifest fruit of power than this. Will too is here subdued. Thus, in spite of all we have to endure, we have with God constant joy. It is a blessed picture of the form in which divine life manifests itself.

[\* The antecedent is, I think, here the Lord; but the Lord and God are greatly merged in one thought.]

And here the apostle connects this life of endurance with that which is its source, its aim, and its present possession by faith. Walking thus we are full of joy, and we give thanks to the Father who has made\* us meet to share the portion of the saints in light. Here are the saints established in their proper relationship with God (their Father; in heaven — in the light, that which God is, and in which He dwells. Thus we have the state of the

soul, the character of the walk, and the strength in which we accomplish it. As to meetness for God in light, we possess it. Moreover we are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son.

[\* Take especial notice here, that it is not said "will make us meet," as a thing yet to be done, and in which we make progress.]

7 The means employed, and the practical character of the work which sets us in the light, are then presented, introducing us (as far as Colossians does) into the counsels of God, but in a practical way — in their results future or present, not in counsel nor as the mystery of His will.

The Father has delivered us from the power of darkness, and transported us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. It is not a Jewish rule for man; it is an operation of the power of God, who treats us as altogether by nature the slaves of Satan and of darkness; and places us by an act of that power in an entirely new position and relationship with Himself. We see indeed here, if we examine the principles in their origin, the same thing as in Ephesians 1:4, 5; 2:1-6, as to our position before. But it is evident that the fullness and definiteness of a new creation are wanting.\* "The inheritance of the saints in light," "the kingdom of the Son of his love," remind us of Ephesians 1:4, 5; but it is not the thing itself, as it is in God's mind, but our having been made meet for it when here; nor consequently the development of a position with which one is familiar as standing in it. The power and the love of the Father have made us meet for it, and although the character of God is necessarily there as light and love, according to His relationship to His Son, yet what we have here is not our own relationship with God Himself, outside the question of whence He took us, but the work in general which places us there in contrast with our previous position. He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son; we have part in the inheritance of the saints in light: but where is the saint "without blame before him in love?" where our relationship to Him, according to the counsels of Him who saw only the good which He purposed in His own heart? where the "children unto himself by Jesus Christ," through His predestination before the world was?

[\* We shall also see, further on, that the starting-point is somewhat different, and, though Ephesian ground is partially referred to, brings in man as he is found living in sin, and less absolutely to God, who finds him already dead

in sins, and creates him according to His own counsels. But of this hereafter. Further, in Ephesians 1:6 our place is full grace in Christ; in Colossians 1 it is present actual deliverance from the power of darkness and translation into the kingdom of the Son of His love — not grace or favor in the Beloved.]

8 In Ephesians deliverance is brought in as a consequence of the position in which the heirs, the objects of the eternal counsels of God, are seen.\* Here deliverance is the chief subject. How dangerous and disastrous it is to depart from the Head and to lose the full consciousness, in the light, of our union with Him! How perfect and precious is that grace which takes notice of our condition, and brings us out of it to God, to make us enjoy — according to the power and grace of God — the inestimable position which He has given us in Christ!

[\* This belongs to the principle mentioned above. In Ephesians, all is seen from the point of view of God's eternal counsels before evil existed, the good which He purposed in Himself, although redemption was necessary when evil had come in, and the glory of God Himself and the basis of our glory in the accomplishment of them, was made good in it. In Colossians man in evil is the object of grace.]

The means which the Spirit here employs to accomplish this work of grace is the development of the glory of the Lord, of the Son of His love.

Here alone, I believe, is the kingdom called the kingdom of the Son; and, I think, it is only as introducing His Person as the center of everything and giving us the measure of the greatness of the blessing. It is the kingdom of One who has this place, the Son of His love, into which we are introduced. It is indeed His kingdom; and in order that we may apprehend the character of this kingdom as it is now for us, and our nearness to God as having part in it, it is called the kingdom of the Son of His love. It is this which is the present foundation and characteristic of the relationship with God of those who are truly in and of it. As the kingdom of the Son of man, it is His manifestation hereafter in glory and in government. Here it is characterised by the relationship of the Son Himself to the Father, in His Person, with the addition of that which gives us a full title to share it — redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

9 The apostle, having thus introduced the Son in His relationship to the Father, as the central and mighty object which was to attract the heart of the Colossians and set them free from the yoke of ordinances, sketches now the different parts of the glory of that Person. If therefore the

assembly's own glory is wanting, that of Jesus is so much the rather set in stronger relief before us. Thus God brings good out of evil, and in every way feeds His beloved people.

The Lord Jesus is the image of the invisible God. It is in the Son of His love that we see what God is (compare John 1:18; and also 1 John 1:2). This is the first character of His personal glory, the essential center of all the rest. Now, in consequence of this proper character of His Person, He takes by right the position of representing God in the creation. Adam was created in some sort in the image of God, and placed as center in a creation that was subjected to him. But, after all, he was only a figure of the Christ, of Him who was to come. The Son, in His very Person, in His nature (and for us as in the bosom of the Father), is He who makes God known, because He presents Him in His own Person and in a full revelation of His being and of His character before men and in the whole universe; for all the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him. Nevertheless He is a man. He is thus seen of angels. We have seen Him with our eyes or by faith. Thus He is the image of the invisible God. The perfect character and living representation of the invisible God have been seen in Him. Wondrous truth for us with regard to the Person of our Savior!

But then what place can He have in creation when He has come into it according to the eternal counsels of God? He could have but one, namely, that of supremacy without contestation and without controversy. He is the firstborn of all creation; this is a relative name, not one of date with regard to time. It is said of Solomon, "I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." Thus the Creator, when He takes a place in creation, is necessarily its Head. He has not yet made good His rights, because in grace He would accomplish redemption. We are speaking of His rights — rights which faith recognises.

He is then the image of the invisible God, and, when He takes His place in it, the Firstborn of all creation. The reason of this is worthy of our attention — simple, yet marvelous: He created it. It was in the Person of the Son that God acted, when by His power He created all things, whether in heaven or in the earth, visible and invisible. All that is great and exalted is but the work of His hand; all has been created by Him (the Son) and for Him. Thus, when He takes possession of it, He takes it as His inheritance



by right. Wonderful truth, that He who has redeemed us, who made Himself man, one of us as to nature, in order to do so, is the Creator. But such is the truth.

In connection with this admirable truth, it was a part of God's counsels that man should have dominion over all the works of His hands. Thus Christ, as man, has it by right and will take possession of it in fact. This part of the truth of which we are speaking is treated in Hebrews 2; we shall consider it in its place. I introduce it here merely that we may understand the circumstances under which the Son takes possession. The Spirit speaks of the One who is man, but the One who is at the same time Creator of all things, the Son of God. They were created by Him, they were necessarily then created also for Him.

Thus we have hitherto the glory of the Person of Christ and His glory in creation connected with His Person. In Him is seen the image of the invisible God. He has created all things: all is for Him; and He is the Firstborn of all that is created.

Another category of glory, another supremacy, is now presented. He takes a special place in relation to the assembly in the power of resurrection. It is the introduction of divine power, not in creation but in the empire of death; in order that others may participate in His glory by redemption, and by the power of life in Him. The first glory was, so to speak, natural — the latter special and acquired (although in virtue of the glory of His Person) by undergoing death, and all the power of the enemy in it. Accordingly it is connected, as we have just said, with redemption, and with the introduction of others into the participation of the same privileges. He is the Head of the body which is the assembly, the Beginning, the Firstborn from among the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence. He is the Firstborn of creation, He is the Firstborn\* according to the power of resurrection, in this new order of things in which man is predestined to an entirely new position, gained by redemption, and in which he participates in the glory of God (as far as that which is created can do so), and that by participating in divine life in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and everlasting life; and, as regards the assembly, as members of His body. He is the Firstborn of creation, the Firstborn from among the dead; the Creator and the conqueror of death and the enemy's power.

These are the two spheres of the display of the glory of God. The special position of the assembly, the body of Christ, forms a part of the latter. He must have this resurrection-glory, this universal pre-eminence and superiority also, as being man, for all the fullness (namely, of the Godhead, see chap. 2:9) was pleased to dwell in Him. What place could He have except that of first in all things! But, before speaking of that which follows, some important remarks are yet to be made on that which we have been considering.

- [\* One of these pre-eminences depends on His divine rights as Creator, the other on His work and on the power displayed in His humanity in the act of resurrection. He holds all as man and all by divine power; but in some sort it may be said that one part of His glory depends on His divinity, the other on His victory as man.]

The Son is here presented to us as Creator, not to the exclusion of the Father's power, nor of the operation of the Spirit. They are one, but it is the Son who is here set before us. In John 1 it is the Word who creates all things. Here, and in Hebrews 1, it is under the name of Son, that He, who is also the Word, is revealed to us. He is the Word of God, the expression of His thought and of His power. It is by Him that God works and reveals Himself. He is also the Son of God; and, in particular, the Son of the Father. He reveals God, and he who has seen Him has seen the Father. Inasmuch as born in this world by the operation of God through the Holy Ghost, He is the Son of God (Psalm 2:7; Luke 1:35). But this is in time, when creation is already the scene of the manifestation of the ways and counsels of God. But the Son is also the name of the proper relationship of His glorious Person to the Father before the world was. It is in this character that He created all things. The Son is to be glorified even as the Father. If He humble Himself, as He did for us, all things are put into His hands, in order that His glory may be manifested in the same nature in the assumption of which He humbled Himself. And already the power of life and of God in Him is manifested by resurrection, so that He is declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection. This is the proof of it.

In the epistle to the Colossians that which is set before us is the proper glory of His Person as the Son before the world was. He is the Creator as Son. It is important to observe this. But the persons are not separated in their manifestation. If the Son wrought miracles on earth, He cast out devils by the Spirit; and the Father who dwells in Him (Christ) did the

works. Also it must be remembered, that that which is said is said, when He was manifested in the flesh, of His complete Person, man upon earth. Not that we do not in our minds separate between the divinity and the humanity; but even in separating them we think of the one Person with regard to whom we do so. We say, Christ is God, Christ is man; but it is Christ who is the two. I do not say this theologically, but to draw the reader's attention to the remarkable expression, "All the fullness was pleased to dwell in him." All the fullness of the Godhead was found in Christ. The Gnostics, who in later years so much harassed the assembly, used this word "fullness" in a mystical and peculiar sense for the sum and source (and yet after all, in the sense of a locality; for it had limits which separated it from everything else) of divinity which developed itself in four pairs of beings — syzygies — Christ being only one of a pair.\* It is not necessary to go further into their reveries, except to observe that, with different shades of thought, they attribute creation to a God either inferior or evil, who also was the author of the Old Testament. Matter, they said, did not proceed from the supreme God. They did not eat meat; they did not marry; at the same time they gave themselves up to all sorts of horrors and dissoluteness; and, strange to say, associated themselves with Judaism, worshipped angels, etc.

[\* Indeed added to the four as supplementary.]

The apostle was often in conflict with these tools of Satan. Peter also mentions them. Here Paul sets forth, by the word of God, the whole fullness of the divinity of Christ. Far from being something inferior, an emanation, or having a place however exalted in those endless genealogies, all the fullness itself dwelt in Him. Glorious truth with regard to the Person of the Lord our Savior! We may leave all the foolish imaginations of man in the shade, in order to enjoy the perfect light of this glorious fullness of God in our Head and Lord. All the fullness was in Him. We know indeed the Father, but revealed by Him. We possess indeed the Spirit, but the fullness of the Spirit was in Him, and because, having accomplished our redemption and our purification, He then received that Spirit for us. And God Himself in all His fullness was revealed, without any reservation, in the Person of Christ; and this Christ is ours, our Savior, our Lord. He has been manifested to us and for us. What a glorious truth for us!

It is for His own glory, no doubt, that He should be known as He is, as love; but it is not the less true that this revelation was in connection with us. It is not only the Son revealing the Father, sweet and precious as that fact is; it is the fullness of the Godhead as such that is revealed and shown forth in Christ. It was the good pleasure of the fullness to dwell there.

But Christ was not only the Head of creation in virtue of the divine glory of His Person, and the Head of the assembly as risen from among the dead and victorious over the power of the enemy; creation, and all those who were to form the assembly, were alike far from God, and the latter were so even in their will; to be in relationship with God they must be reconciled to Him. This is the second part of the glory of Christ. Not only was it the good pleasure of the fullness of the Godhead to dwell in Him, but by Him to reconcile all things to itself, having made peace by the blood of the cross. This reconciliation of things in heaven as well as on earth is not yet accomplished. Peace is indeed made by the blood, but the power has not yet come in to bring back the whole into actual relationship with God according to the value of that blood.

Thus, in Israel, the blood was put upon the mercy-seat, and expiation — peace, was made; but besides this everything was sprinkled, and the sins of the people were confessed. This, with regard to Israel and to creation, has not yet been done. As to that which is outward, it remains still at a distance from God, although peace is made. We know that it is the good pleasure of God to reconcile all things in heaven, and on the earth, by virtue of this blood. All things shall be restored to order under a new rule. The guilty, remaining in their sins, will be outside this scene of blessing; but heaven and earth will be completely freed from the power of evil (and even from its presence during the millennium, as regards manifestation — still later, absolutely from its presence itself), according to the virtue of that blood which has separated between good and evil, according to the character of God Himself, and so glorified God that peace is made. God can act freely for blessing; but here the work is twofold, like the glory of the Person of Christ, and refers to the same objects as His glory. It is in the counsels of God to reconcile unto Himself all things in heaven and on the earth through Christ. But Christians He has already reconciled. Once not only defiled, like the creature, but enemies in their minds, He has already reconciled them in the body of His flesh by means of death. The

perfect work which Christ accomplished in His body, blotting out our sins and perfectly glorifying God His Father, has brought us into relationship with God in His holiness according to the efficacy of that work; that is to say, it is efficacious to present us, perfectly reconciled, holy, without blemish and without blame before His face; and with the consciousness of it, and of the love that has wrought it, and the favor into which we are brought, so that in the sense of this the heart is brought back to God: we are reconciled to God. This supposes that we continue steadfast in the faith unto the end.

The position of the Colossians gave room for this warning, being viewed as walking on earth.\* We have seen that they had a little departed, or were in danger of departing, from the realisation of their union with Christ.

[\* When the Christian is viewed as in Christ, there is no "if": we are in Him. When he is viewed as a pilgrim here, we are on the road to actual glory, and have to reach the goal, and here "if" comes in, and danger, and the need of being kept. But then we have the fullest assurance that we shall be kept and never perish, and be confirmed to the end, and the good work completed. Thus dependence on God is maintained in the saved, and confidence in His faithfulness.]

It will be noticed also, that the apostle speaks of his gospel as spread abroad in all the world. Grace had overstepped the narrow limits of Judaism and the expectation of the Messiah, in order to make known the testimony of the perfect love of God in the whole creation under heaven, of which Paul was the instrument as the apostle of the Gentiles.

[\* Note here how clear and full the statement is: verse 14, redemption and forgiveness; verse 21, reconciliation with God; verse 13, deliverance and introduction into the kingdom; verse 12, we are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. All this we have, and so are called to walk worthy of the Lord.]

Hitherto, then, the Spirit of God has set before us the two pre-eminences of Christ, that over creation and that over the assembly, and the two reconciliations which answer to them; namely, first, that of the things over which Christ is set as Head, that is, of all things in heaven and earth; and second, that of Christians themselves: the latter already accomplished, the former yet to come. The ministry of the apostle had now the same double character. He has not undoubtedly to preach in heaven; but his ministry is exercised in every place under heaven where there is a soul to hearken. He

is a minister of that gospel; and then he is a minister of the assembly, a distinct service or ministry, making known its true position and its privileges, connected indeed with the other, in that the gospel went out also to the Gentiles to bring them in (v. 23, 25). By this last instruction he completed the word of God: an important principle with regard to the exclusive authority of the written word, which shows that its totality already exists, demonstrated by the subjects which it comprises; subjects which are entirely completed, to the exclusion of others which people may seek to introduce. The circle of truths which God had to treat, in order to reveal to us the glory of Christ and to give us complete instruction according to His wisdom, is entire, when the doctrine of the assembly is revealed. There were no others to be added.\*

[\* It is not a question here as to the dates of the books, but of the circle of subjects. The law, the kingdom, the Person of Christ, redemption and the ways of God, had already been brought out; the doctrine of the assembly was then to be revealed, in order to make the communications of God complete as to their subjects.]

But this doctrine in particular exposed the apostle to persecution and sufferings, which the Jews especially, and the enemy sought in every way to inflict upon him. But he rejoiced in this as a privilege, because Christ had suffered on account of His love for the assembly — for His own. The apostle speaks here, not of the efficacy of His death, but of the love which led Him to suffer. Looked at in this point of view, the apostle could participate in His sufferings, and we also in our little measure; but the apostle in a peculiar manner, as the special witness-bearer to this truth. If Christ had been content to accept the position of Messiah according to man, He would have been well received. If Paul had preached circumcision, the offense of the cross would have ceased: man could have taken part in the religion of God, if His religion had recognised man in the flesh. But if God is revealed, if His grace extends to the Gentiles, if by this grace, and without having respect to the Jew more than to the Gentile, He forms an assembly, which is the body of Christ, sharing the heavenly glory of His Son — this is what the flesh cannot endure. To be thus shut out as nothing worth before God, even in its religion, take what pains it might — this is unbearable. This is the source of the enmity of the Judaising spirit, which is founded on the flesh, on man, and which is constantly reappearing in the apostle's history, whether as exciting the hatred of the heathen, or as

corrupting the doctrine of Christ and the simplicity of the gospel. Religion in the flesh boasts its own peculiar privileges (see Philippians 3).

Thus we have a double ministry, as well as a double preeminence of Christ, and a double reconciliation; and each having a similar relationship the one to the other: Christ, the Head of all things in heaven and earth, the Head of the assembly; all things in heaven and earth are to be reconciled, Christians are reconciled; Paul exercises his ministry in the whole creation under heaven, he is the minister of the assembly. Naturally his ministry was limited to the earth. In every respect the extent and bearing of the glory of Christ, and of the ministry, went beyond the limits of Judaism, and were in contrast with the whole system.

The apostle then insists on the second part of his ministry, of which he had been just speaking; dwelling however particularly on that which met the need of the Colossians, and developing it, in order to secure them in the enjoyment of the whole circle of these precious truths. He completed the word of God by announcing this mystery, which had been hidden from all ages and generations, but was now manifested to the saints. No display of the ways of God since the creation had (in the truths on which it was founded, in the revelation of God — of His power, or of His thoughts, which formed its basis and gave it its character) contained the mystery contained in the doctrine of the assembly. It had not been communicated to any of those who formed part of the system which preceded it, or who were the medium of light to others, as instrumental in the revelation of the light of God. Angels, men, Israel, the prophets — all were alike in ignorance of it. The assembly (this body united to the Son of God become man and glorified) and the calling of the Gentiles into that unity was hidden from them all.

Now that Christ the Head of the assembly, the Head of the body, was glorified, the mystery of this body was made known. The apostle here dwells on one particular side of this subject, which, after the Person of Christ, forms the center of all God's ways. This side is Christ in us, especially as Gentiles, the hope of glory. And in this again we see how the saints are viewed as on earth, though in the power of resurrection. The aspect here given of the mystery is, Christ in us down here, not union with Him actually in glory, though inseparable from that. In fact, this mystery

was in every way a new thought, a new truth. That which was known was a Messiah who should be manifested among the Jews, the accomplishment of glory in their midst; the Gentiles at most having part in it, as subordinate to the people of God. But according to the doctrine of the assembly, Christ invisibly dwelt in the midst of the Gentiles,\* and even in them; and as to the glory He was only the hope of it. A Christ dwelling in the hearts of men, and of men formerly rejected and outside the promises, and filling their hearts with joy and glory in the consciousness of union with Himself — this was the wondrous mystery prepared of God for the blessing of the Gentiles. It was this Christ, a Christ such as this, whom Paul preached, warning every man, and teaching every man according to the full development of the wisdom of God, which wrought mightily in the apostle by the Spirit, in order that he might present every man in a spiritual state answering to this revelation of Christ, as being also its fruit. Not that every man would receive it; but there was no longer any limit. All distinction between them was blotted out, alike by sin and by grace, and there was but one thing to do; that is, to seek that every man, by the power of the word and the Spirit, should reflect Christ and grow up unto the stature of His fullness, as revealed in the doctrine committed to the apostle. He labored for this according to the working of Christ in him; for Christ was not only the object, but the power that wrought to form souls after His own image.

[\* I have already remarked that the Gentiles are especially in view in the Colossians, not the union of Jew and Gentile in one.]

Now this power wrought in the apostle's weakness; in a human heart, that felt the necessities of men and the difficulties that occurred by the way — that felt them as a man, although according to God, and was the fruit of His love. He desired that the Colossians should understand the conflict he had for them, and for all those who had never seen him, in order that they might be encouraged and be thoroughly united in love; so that they might understand, in all the riches of a full assurance, the mystery of God.

The apostle felt that it was this which they needed and which would be a blessing to them. He knew that union with Christ, realised in the heart, was a safeguard from the wiles of the enemy, to which the Colossians were exposed. He knew the unutterable value of this union, and even of its realisation by faith. He labored, he wrestled in prayer — for it is indeed a



conflict — in order that the full sense of this union with the glorious Head might be wrought in their hearts, so that the Christ on high should be in them by faith. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were found in the mystery, of which this was to their souls the center and the power. They had not to seek elsewhere. Science, falsely so called, might pretend to furnish them with heights to which the simplicity of the doctrines of Christ did not reach; but in fact the wisdom of God and the depths of His counsels left these cloudy efforts of the human mind at an infinite distance. Moreover they were truth — reality — instead of being but the creatures of imagination inspired by the enemy.

For this reason the apostle had brought forward these marvelous revelations of God respecting the double glory of Christ, and with regard to His Person. He declared them in order that no one should beguile the Colossians with enticing words. He avails himself of the order that existed among them, and of their faith to guard them against the danger they were in from these thoughts, which might glide unperceived into their minds, while all was yet going on well, and the consciousness of their faith was not touched. This often happens. People have faith in Christ, they walk well, they do not perceive that certain ideas overthrow that faith; they admit them, while still maintaining the profession of faith together with these ideas; but the force of the truth and the sense of union with Christ and the simplicity that is in Him are lost. The enemy has so far attained his end. That which is received is not the development of Christ, but something outside Him.

Therefore the apostle says, “As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him; rooted and built up in him, and confirmed in the faith, even as ye have been taught.” When we have received Christ, all the rest is but a development of that which He is, and of the glory which the counsels of God have connected with His Person. Knowledge, or pretended knowledge, outside this, does but turn us away from Him, withdraw our hearts from the influence of His glory, throw us into that which is false, and lead our souls into connection with the creation apart from God, and without possessing the key to His purposes. Thus, since man is incapable of fathoming that which exists, and of explaining it to himself, his efforts to do so cause him to invent a mass of ideas that have no foundation, and to endeavor to fill up the void that is found in his knowledge through his

ignorance of God, by speculations, in which (because he is at a distance from God) Satan plays the chief part without man's suspecting it.

Man, as a child of Adam, is not at the center of the immense system of God's ways. Out of Christ and without Christ, he does not know the center; he speculates, without foundation and without end, only to lose himself more and more. His knowledge of good and evil, and the energy of his moral faculties, do but lead him astray the more, because he employs them on higher questions than those which simply relate to physical things; and they produce in him the need of reconciling apparently inconsistent principles, which cannot be reconciled without Christ. Moreover the tendency of man is always to make himself, as he is, the center of everything; and this renders everything false.

Christians then ought to walk with simplicity in the ways of the Lord, even as they have received Him; and their progress ought to be in the knowledge of Christ, the true center and fullness of all things.

When man occupies himself philosophically with all things, the insufficiency of his own resources always throws him into the hands of an intellectual leader, and into tradition; and, when religion is the subject, into traditions which develop the religion of the flesh, and are suited to its powers and tendencies.

In those days Judaism had the highest pretensions to this kind of religion, allied itself with human speculations and adopted them, and even pursued them assiduously; offering at the same time proofs of divine origin, and a testimony to the unity of the Godhead, which the absence of the grossness of Pagan mythology and the meeting of human consciousness of the divine rendered credible. This relative purity tended to remove — for enlightened minds — that which was disgusting in the Pagan system. The Jewish system had, by the death of Jesus, lost all pretension to be the true worship of God; and was therefore suited (by the advantages it offered in the comparative purity of its dogmas) to be an instrument of Satan in opposing the truth. At all times it was adapted to the flesh, was founded on the elements of this world, because by its means, when owned of God, God was proving man in the position man stood in. But now God was no longer in it; and the Jews, moved by envy, urged the Gentiles to persecution; and Judaism allied itself to Pagan speculations, in order to

corrupt and sap the foundations of Christianity, and destroy its testimony.

In principle it is always thus. The flesh may appear for a time to despise tradition, but that which is purely intellectual cannot stand in the midst of humanity without something religious. It has not the truth nor the world which belongs to faith, and for an immense majority superstition and tradition are needed; that is to say, a religion which the flesh can lay hold of, and which suits the flesh. God by His power may preserve a portion of the truth, or allow the whole to be corrupted; but in either case true christian position and the doctrine of the assembly are lost.\*

[\* There were some very beautiful legends, embracing partial truths, in the Gnostic system; but they had lost God and truth, and reality of conscience before God.]

We may indeed find philosophy apart from the religion of the flesh, and the latter apart from the former; but in this case philosophy is impotent and atheistic, the religion of the flesh narrow, legal, superstitious, and, if it can be so, persecuting.

In our chapter we find philosophy and the emptiness of human wisdom united with the traditions of men, characterised as “the elements of this world,” in opposition to Christ: for we have a heavenly Christ who is a perfect contrast to the flesh in man living on earth, a Christ in whom is all wisdom and fullness, and the reality of all that which the law pretended to give, or which it presented in figure: and who is at the same time an answer to all our wants. This the apostle develops here, showing death and resurrection with Him as the means of participating in it.

And first all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him bodily. Instead of the misty speculations of men and fantastic aeons, we have the fullness of God bodily, in a real human body, and thus efficaciously for us, in the Person of Jesus Christ. In the second place we are complete in Him; we need nothing out of Christ.\* On the one side, we have, in Him, God perfectly presented in all His fullness; on the other side, we possess in Him perfection and completeness before God. We are wanting in nothing as to our position before God. What a truth! What a position! God, in His perfect fullness, in Christ as man; we in Him before God, in the perfection of what He is — in Him who is Head of all principality and power, before

which man in his ignorance would incline to bend the knee! We are in Him, in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells as to His Person; in Him, who is above all principality as to His position and His rights as Christ, man exalted on high.

[\* These expressions relate to the double character of Christ already set before us in chapter 1. They show us what we have in Christ in a positive way, as that which follows applies it to everything here below which would prevent our enjoying it. In Christ is the fullness of the Godhead, the object of our delight, in whom we possess all things. We have also in Him a position above all creation, in the perfection which has placed Christ there. We are completed in Him who is the Head of all principality and of all power. As regards the phraseology, the change of a word, to one not however better in itself, shows the mind of the apostle. In Him dwelleth all the completeness of the Godhead bodily; and we are complete in Him.]

The apostle then enters into some details of application to demonstrate that the faithful have all in Christ, viewed according to the position which He has taken without having anything to seek elsewhere here below.

Circumcision (the divine token of the covenant with the Jews, and of the putting off the flesh, which was required in order to form part of God's people) had its reality in Him. By the power of the life which is in Him, and which is theirs — being made partakers of the efficacy of His death — Christians account themselves to be dead, and have put off this body of sin by faith. This is the true circumcision of Christ made without hands. Circumcision made by hands was but the sign of this putting off the body of the flesh — the privilege of the Christian in Christ. Having a new life in Christ, he has efficaciously put off the old man.

We are buried with Christ by baptism (this is its meaning), in which also we are risen with Him by faith in this operation of the power of God whereby He was raised from among the dead. Baptism was the sign and expression of this;\* faith in the operation of God which raised Him, the means by which is effected in us this marvelous resurrection with Christ into a new state and scene — this happy death, or rather this precious participation in the death of Him who has accomplished all for us. And when I say "faith," it is the power of God's Spirit working in us. But it is the power of God Himself, as it wrought in Christ, which works in us to give us the new standing in life. Viewed in connection with our resurrection with Christ it implies — by the very fact of our receiving it — that we are

forgiven perfectly and for ever. We were under the burden of our sins, and dead in them. This burden Christ took upon Himself, and died for us, accomplishing what put away our sins in going down into death. Raised up with Him, inasmuch as partaking of that life which He possesses as risen from the dead, we have — like Him and with Him — left all that burden of sin and condemnation behind us with the death from which we have been delivered. Therefore He says, “Having forgiven you all trespasses.”

[\* Some do not connect “risen” with baptism. If so, I apprehend the passage must be read thus: “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism; in whom also ye are risen together meaning with Christ] through faith,” etc. Baptism clearly signifies death, and it is not the baptising but the coming out of the water which can be applied to resurrection. The giving of life is in no way the sense of baptism even as a figure, but leaving the life of Adam by death (the death of Christ) and entrance through that gate into a wholly new place and position.]

Christ, when He arose, left death and the weight of condemnation under which we were lying, behind Him — we also being raised up with Him. Naturally God, in thus raising us up from the state in which we were, has not raised us up to condemn us, or with condemnation attached to this new life, which is Christ Himself. For He had already born the condemnation, and satisfied the justice of God, and died for the putting away of sin, before He communicated this life to us. God brought us out of death and condemnation with Christ who had born it for us. But this is connected with another aspect of this work of grace, spoken of here, and also in Ephesians, and even in John 5 and 2 Corinthians 5. He who is alive in sins is dead in them towards God. If I look at him as alive in them, death must come in and has come in on the cross (see Romans 6). This side is not brought forward in Ephesians; only death in Romans; in Colossians death and resurrection in Christ, of which we have spoken. In Ephesians this is not spoken of at all. We are viewed as dead in sins, dead towards God, and all good is a new creation according to God’s counsels. We are quickened together with Christ when dead in sins. This also is taken up in Colossians: only it is not spoken of as a new creation. But in both a new life is given when we are dead; only Ephesians begins with this in Christ raised and exalted, and by the same power in us. In Colossians it is introduced as completing what is taught of the administration of this

doctrine of death in baptism, and our resurrection by faith of God's operation in Christ. In Ephesians grace finds us dead and quickens with Christ. In Colossians it finds us alive in sins and brings in death and resurrection, and completes this by quickening with Christ.

All the ordinances likewise, which belonged to the rudiments of this world and which applied to man in the flesh, and weighed as an unsupportable yoke upon the Jews (and to which they endeavored to bring others into subjection), which put the conscience always under the burden of a service unaccomplished by man, and a righteousness unsatisfied in God — these ordinances were blotted out. In them the Jew had put his signature, so to speak, to his guiltiness; but the obligation was destroyed and nailed to the cross of Christ. We receive liberty as well as life and pardon.

This is not all. There was the strength of principalities and powers against us — the might of spiritual wickedness. Christ has vanquished and despoiled them on the cross, having triumphed over them in it. All that was against us He has put aside, in order to introduce us, entirely delivered from it all, into our new position. It will be seen here, that what the apostle says of the work of Christ does not go beyond that which He did for our deliverance, in order to set us in the heavenly places. He speaks (v. 10) of the rights of Christ, but not as sitting in the heavenly places, nor as leading the enemy captive; neither does he speak of us as sitting in Him in the heavenlies. He has done all that is necessary to bring us into them; but the Colossians are viewed as on earth, though risen, and in danger at least of losing the sense of the position which was theirs in virtue of their union with Christ, and were in danger of slipping back into the elements of the world and of flesh, of the man alive in the flesh, not dead, not risen with Christ; and the apostle seeks to bring them back to it, by showing how Christ had accomplished all that was requisite — had taken out of the way all that prevented their attaining it. But he cannot speak of the position itself: they were not consciously in it. In the things of God we cannot comprehend a position without being in it. God may reveal it. God may show us the way of it. The apostle does so here with regard to the Person of Christ, which alone could bring them back to it; and at the same time he develops the efficacy of His work in this respect, in order to set them free from the shackles that kept them back, and to show them that all obstacles

had been removed. But in detail he has to apply it to the dangers that beset them rather than to display its glorious results in heaven.

Jewish ordinances were but shadows, Christ is the substance. By bringing in angels as objects of homage, and thus putting them between themselves and Christ, they would separate themselves from the Head of the body, who was above all principalities. The simplicity of christian faith held fast the Head, from which the whole body directly drew its nourishment and thus increased with the increase of God. It looked like humility, thus to bring themselves into relation with angels, as superior and exalted beings who might serve as mediators. But there were two faults of immense importance in this apparent humility. Firstly, it really was thorough pride — this pretension to penetrate into the secrets of heaven of which they were ignorant. What did they know of any position held by angels, which would make them the objects of such homage? It was pretending to mount up into heaven for and by themselves, and to measure their relations with God's creatures without Christ, and at their own will to connect themselves with them. Secondly, it was to deny their union with Christ. One with Him, there could be nothing between Him and them; if there were anything, then they were dead and twice dead. Besides, by this union they were one with Him who was above the angels. United to Him, they received, as we have seen, a communication, through all the members of the body, of the treasures of grace and life which were in the Head. The mutual links between the members of the body itself were thereby strengthened, and thus the body had its increase.

Two applications of the doctrine that they are dead with Christ and risen with Him follow (chap. 2:20). He applies the principle of death to all the ordinances, and to the asceticism which treated the body as a thing vile in itself which ought to be rejected; and (chap. 3:1) he uses the resurrection to raise their hearts into a higher sphere and to bring them back to Christ by looking up, they being dead as regards the old man.\*

[\* These applications flow from chapter 2:11, 12: It is to be remarked that Romans from chapter 5:12 treats of death to sin, in which man (as child of Adam) was alive. In Ephesians man is reckoned as dead in sins as towards God. Colossians takes up both: chapter 2:11, 12 follows them out, adding resurrection with Christ. Verse 13 follows Ephesian doctrine. Chapters 2:20, 3:1, follow on chapter 2:11, 12, and we have the putting off of the old and putting on of the new man.]

To make these instructions more plain by showing their connection, we may remark that the apostle points out the double danger, namely, philosophy, and human tradition, in contrast with Christ (chap. 2:3; see v. 9-15). While identifying us with Christ, he speaks of the bearing of the work of Christ Himself rather than of this identification. In verses 16-19 he applies it first (v. 16) to subjection to ordinances, that is, to the Jewish side of their danger; and then (v. 18) to the Gnostic philosophy,\* science falsely so called, which linked itself with Judaism (or to which Judaism linked itself), reproducing itself under a new form. From verse 20 the apostle applies our death and resurrection with Christ to the same points, or to the deliverance of the Colossians by raising their thoughts on high.

[\* Although this word has the appearance of learning and of not being scriptural, this is not the case. Science, falsely so called, of which the apostle speaks elsewhere, is in Greek “gnosis,” whence this presumptuous and corrupting philosophy was called “Gnosticism,” and its votaries “Gnostics.” It plays an immense part in the history of the church, with which I have nothing to do here. But its principles are frequently found in the New Testament, brought forward by the apostles in order to combat them. The Jews had largely fallen into the notion of a mediatorial work of angels, though not in the form exactly of Gnostic philosophy.]

But the Colossians are not the only ones who may have been in this danger. In the main these principles have been the ruin of the church at all times. They are those of the mystery of iniquity,\* which has so much ripened since then, and produced effects so various, and under such different modifications on account of other principles which have also acted, and under the sovereign providence of God. We shall see the deep simple, and decisive principle which is involved in it in the verses that follow.

[\* This was working in the apostle’s days; Paul withstood it in the energy of the Holy Ghost. After his departure that power was gone. The historical church never had the two great fundamental principles of Christianity, perfection in Christ (“by one offering he hath perfected for ever”), and the presence and leading power of the Holy Ghost down here. These were supplanted by sacraments and the clergy.]

The verses already quoted, as far as the twentieth, had judged this whole Judaeo-philosophic system from the point of view of Christ’s work, of His resurrection, and of union with Him in His heavenly position.



That which follows judges it after our position. The preceding verses had demonstrated that the system was false, because Christ and His work were such as is declared in them. The passage we are going to consider shows that this system is absurd, cannot be applied to us, has no possible application, because of our position. On the one hand it is a false system, null and void in all its parts, if Christ is true and is in heaven and, on the other hand, it is an absurd system in its application to us, if we are Christians. And for this reason: it is a system which supposes life in this world, and relationships to be acquired with God, having their foundation in that life, while it pretends to mortify flesh; and yet in addresses itself to persons who, for faith, are dead. The apostle says, that we are dead to the rudiments of this world, to all the principles on which its life acts. Why then, as though we were still living (alive) in it, as though we were still alive in this world, do we subject ourselves to ordinances which have to do with this life and which suppose its existence? ordinances which apply to things which perish in the use of them, and which have no connection with that which is heavenly and eternal. They have indeed a semblance of humility and self-denial as regards the body, but they have no link with heaven, which is the sphere of the new life — of all its motives, and all its development; and they do not recognise the honor of the creature, as a creature come out of the hand of God, which, as such, has always its place and its honor. They put a man in and under the flesh, while pretending to deliver us from it, and they separate the believer from Christ by putting angels between the soul and the heavenly place and blessing; whereas we are united to Christ, who is above all these powers, and we in Him.

These ordinances had to do with merely corruptible things — were not connected with the new life, but with man living in his life of flesh on the earth, to which life the Christian is morally dead; and as far as regarded this life, they did not recognise the body as a creature of God, as it ought to be recognised.

Thus the system of ordinances had lost Christ, who was their substance. It was connected with the pride that pretended to penetrate heaven, in order to put itself in relation with beings whom we do not know in such a manner as to have any relations with them — pride which in so doing separated from the Head of the body, Christ, and thus disowned all connection with the source of life, and with the only true position of the

soul before God. This system falsified equally our position on earth by treating us as though still alive after the old man, whereas we are dead; and dishonored the creature as such, instead of recognising it as coming from the hand of God.

That which was a danger to Christians in the apostle's days characterises Christianity at the present time.

The Christian's position was thus set forth, but in its application thus far rather to the danger of Christians than to their heavenly privileges. Thus grace has provided us with all we need, using every privilege, using the faith of some, giving warnings and instruction above all price, and turning the faults of others to account.

Now begin the direct exhortations founded on the truth that has been developed, and adapted to the state in which the Colossians were; that is, viewed as risen with Christ, but not sitting in heavenly places.

Risen with Christ, they were to set their affections on things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, and not on things on the earth. The two could not go together. To look, to have one's motives, above and below at the same time, is impossible. Be tempted by things, have to resist them, we may; but this is not to have them as our object. The reason for this is however found in our position: we are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God. It does not say, "we must die." Man cannot do this by will: we cannot deny will by will. Nor would the will of the flesh ever do it. If it acts, it does not abdicate. We are dead: this is the precious comforting truth with regard to the Christian by virtue of Christ having died for him. He has received the life of Christ, and all that Christ did for him in that life belongs to him. Thus he is dead, because Christ died for him. The life with which the power of temptation, guilt, the attacks of sin, are connected, exists no longer to faith. By death all that was connected with it has come to an end. Now that which was connected with the life of the old man was sin, condemnation, weakness, fear, powerlessness against the assaults of the enemy — all that is past. We have a life, but it is in Christ; it is hidden with Him in God. We are not yet manifested in its glory, as we shall be manifested before the eyes of all in heaven and earth. Our life is hidden, but safe in its eternal source. It has the portion of Christ, in whom we

possess it. He is hid in God, so also is our life: when Christ shall appear, we shall also appear with Him.

It will be remarked, that the apostle does not speak here of our union with Christ, but of our life, of the fact that we are dead, and that our life is hid with Him in God. He does not speak of the assembly with regard to our position; he speaks, no doubt, of Christ as being its Head, as to His personal glory, but not of it as to us. He speaks of us individually. Each one has his own life in Christ truly, but as his own; it is not union with other Christians. We have this life in Christ, but it is not here our union as one body with Him. It is the individual character of the Christian, to whom Christ, the Head, is everything.

That which is also highly important to observe in connection with this truth is that in this epistle there is nothing said of the Holy Ghost. The apostle speaks practically of their love in the Spirit, but in the instruction of the epistle he does not name Him. Even when he says, “there is neither Jew, nor Greek,” etc., it is in the new man, not because we are one in Christ. The individual was to cleave to the Head. He was no longer living in this world; he was dead, and his life hid with Christ in God. But this was for himself; he was to know it, and hold it fast for himself, as necessary truth, that he might be preserved from the wiles of the enemy. In a word, it is life in Christ. Elsewhere we see many of the things which the apostle here mentions spoken of as the fruit of the Spirit, by which communion and union are maintained; but here it is simply in the nature of the life that these fruits have their source. It is quite natural consequently, that the compass and the assemblage of all spiritual relationships in one, in Christ, which we find in the divine instruction when the Holy Ghost is introduced, are wanting here.

In the epistle to the Ephesians this operation of the Holy Ghost is found everywhere, and characterises the whole of that which is developed in communion with the Head, Christ, with whom we are united in one body by the Spirit. Thus we are individually sealed by the Spirit of promise, the earnest of our inheritance; we all have access to the Father by one Spirit; we are also builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit; the union of the Gentiles in one body is now revealed by the Spirit; saints are strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man; there is one body and one

Spirit; we are not to grieve the Spirit; we are to be filled with Him; the word itself is the sword of the Spirit. The union of the body with Christ, our resurrection with Him, that we are sitting in the heavenlies in Him all that flows from this union, is fully developed; but at the same time the Holy Ghost, who unites us to Him, and unites us all together as one body, and who here below characterises the presence of God in the church, who acts in us, secures our future, and becomes our strength in the present — the Holy Ghost, I repeat, is found everywhere, to complete the truth and to give it its present force for us here below.

Many of the exhortations in the epistle to the Ephesians are nearly the same as those to the Colossians. But in the epistle to the Ephesians they are connected with the Spirit; in that to the Colossians, with the action of the word and of grace in the heart. This gives an immense range and a connectedness to the doctrine of the epistle to the Ephesians, in that which regards our position here below, because it brings in God Himself, and as dwelling in us by the Spirit, and filling us, whether as in the individual or in the oneness of the body; and gives the full scope of the counsels of God.

Yet the possession of life is in its way as important as the presence and indwelling of the Holy Ghost. It makes the blessing ourselves, not merely an operation in us, and, as we have seen, the character of divine life is far more fully developed; whereas in Ephesians it is more contrast with the previous state.

In the epistle to the Romans we have (chap. 8) this action and presence of the Holy Ghost presented in a very remarkable way as to the individual. He characterises us vitally in the principle of our resurrection, is the witness in us that we are children, filling us with joy and with the hope of glory as heirs, the support of our weakness and the source of our petitions and our groans. In the epistle to the Romans it is in connection with our personal relationship to God; in that to the Ephesians, as the presence of God in us in connection with our union to Christ as one body.

There is another thing to be noticed here which throws light on the purpose of the Holy Ghost in these epistles. The starting-point in that to the Ephesians is the counsels of God Man is looked at as he is, without one pulse of life as regards God; he is dead in trespasses and sins, by nature the child of wrath. God is rich in mercy; He raises him up with

Christ who in grace went down into death, and places him according to His counsels in the same position as that Christ is in. We are His workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus. God is pleased to bring us into His presence according to His own counsels and His nature. It is not said that we are dead with Christ. Man is not viewed as living in the flesh, so that in one way or in another he had to die. This was not necessary. The Ephesians were to apprehend, on the one hand, the full contrast between God and man according to His counsels; and on the other, man's sinful state according to nature. In their epistle all is the work of God Himself according to the original purpose of His own heart, of His nature, and of His will;\* man is already dead, and even Christ is not brought in as to His place till viewed as dead, and thereon risen and exalted on high.

[\* Hence we have no justification in Ephesians. It treats of a new creation.]

The Colossians were in danger of subjecting themselves to ordinances, and thereby were in a position to consider man as living in the world; and the apostle makes them feel that they are dead with Christ. He was obliged in grace to follow them where they were, for their danger was to take man into consideration as living on the earth; in order, nevertheless, to show that the Christian had already died with Christ, and his life on earth was as risen with Him.

In the letter to the Ephesians man is not said to die with Christ. He is dead in his sins when God begins to act towards him. No man is alive to God. The Christian is quickened together with Christ, Christ Himself first viewed as dead.

This character of the Colossians however, the dwelling on life or the new man, has its value for us all, and a great value, because the life, the new nature, and grace working in it, are much less brought forward in the epistle to the Ephesians, where the subject is the energy of God, who creates men in Christ and unites them to Him, fills the believer and the assembly here with the nature and the character of the new man. and thereby of Christ, yea, of God Himself.\* One might suppose that there was only the Holy Ghost acting in the fullness of His power, and filling the individual and the assembly. But in this epistle to the Colossians we find that there is a new nature, an intrinsic change, not of the flesh indeed, but of the man. For we are viewed, not merely as quickened by the Son, but as dead and risen with

Christ, the Man who had died, so as to have passed out of — put off — the old standing of a child of Adam, and into a risen one with Christ — put on the new man. This is at once a standing and a state before God, a source of tastes, of sentiments, of desires, of arguments, and of moral capacities, which are in connection with the very nature of God, who has caused it to spring up in the heart. We are renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created us. But this source is a life, which needs that the Holy Ghost should reveal to it the objects that are suited to it, and that awaken these tastes and feelings, which satisfy them and cause them to grow. It needs that the Spirit of God should act in it to give it strength; but it is a real life, a nature which has its tastes attached to its very existence,\*\* which, being enlightened by the Holy Ghost, is conscious of its own existence; and in which we are the children of God, being born of Him.

[\* This difference is of deep interest, and brings out the character of the epistle to the Ephesians in a remarkable way — an epistle in which everything is influenced by the high point of view taken by the Spirit, and flows from the original and eternal counsels of God, and from His operation to bring those counsels to perfection — the settled purposes of His own heart. He desires to have — He creates — something in order to show forth the immense riches of His grace. He has taken the dead and the lost: but they are only the objects of His operations, suited to make these manifest on account of their own condition. He does not work upon the nature of man, because it is contrary to His own, in order to destroy this contrariety. He quickens from the dead, and creates. In Colossians the death of the old man is spoken of, which it was necessary to take into consideration. God be praised, we are entitled to view it as already dead, because Christ has died for us. I may add here to that which I have said of the Holy Ghost, that, when the apostle speaks in Colossians of the power of hope in us, he does not mention the earnest of the Spirit. It is still Christ in us, the hope of glory. Throughout it is Christ, and Christ as life.]

[\*\* With this difference between the actings of the Spirit, and the existence of the new life, is connected the liberty of the soul. When we are born of God, we have necessarily a taste for holiness; love acts in us; we take pleasure in the righteousness of God. But, by virtue of these sentiments, although my heart appreciates love in God, and this love attracts me and inspires me with a measure of confidence, yet my conscience condemns me, I feel that I am not that which I love. I am under the law, and uncertain of my relationship with God. When I have learnt the value of Christ's blood, that He is my righteousness, the Holy Ghost dwelling and acting in me gives me the sense of my relationship with God. I have the consciousness of it in my soul, and the Holy Ghost bears witness of it. There is liberty.]

Neither is it unimportant that we should learn, with regard to the life of the flesh, and when thinking of it, although it be on the negative side, that we

are dead; that God recognises nothing belonging to the old man; that He takes pleasure in a new nature, which is indeed ours by grace, but which is of God Himself, and which is the moral reflection of His own.

We are dead then, and our life is hid with Christ in God. We have members on earth — no recognised life; and we have to put to death\* all these members of the old man. The Christian has to deny them practically as belonging to the old man, while his life is there where Christ is. They bring down the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Christians walked in these things when they had their life in them; but this is no longer the case; and they deny not only gross sins, the fruit of positive lusts (chap. 3:5, 6), but all the workings of an unbroken will and an unsubdued heart, every indication of the actings of the will of that nature which knows not God, and is not ruled by His fear, all anger and malice and falsehood flowing from selfishness or the fear of man (v. 8). Truth reigns in the heart which has put off the old man, according to the simplicity of the new man,\*\* which is renewed also in knowledge after the image of Him who created it (v. 9, 10). The new man walks in the light. It is not only that there is a conscience which judges good and evil according to that which man ought to be according to his nature as a responsible being; there is a new man who judges the old man altogether, judging good and evil according to the knowledge of God. Such is the putting off.

[\* It is a very different thing from dying to sin. This supposes evil in the thing that dies (save of course in the case of Christ who did it for those who had); whereas putting to death is an act of power in that which is good — the new man.]

[\*\* These three form the whole character of evil in man: generally, violence and corruption, the last taking the twofold form of lust and falsehood. So, before the flood, the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. Falsehood is Satan's form of corruption, and violence also characterises him. The Lord declares him to be a liar and a murderer (John 8:44). Man adds the lust because of flesh.]

Before Christianity, which is the full revelation of God, there were indeed, as need not be said, souls born anew; but their rule, when a rule was definitely given, was man's responsibility (whatever piety and grace might inspire), and the law, which was the perfect measure of that which man, as a being responsible to God, ought to be. Saints then did not distinguish between a new and an old man, although of necessity they had the

conscience of the old man and the tastes of the new in measure in many respects. The sense, for instance, of the evil of falsehood had not at all the same place as with the Christian. Now the new man is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created him.\* God Himself in His nature is the standard of good and evil, because the new man has the knowledge of what that nature is; he is made a partaker of it, and he has the light of God. It is an intelligent participation by grace in the nature of God, which is the marvelous and precious privilege of the Christian. God works in this nature; but by communicating it He has placed man in this position. Christ is the perfect model of this image, the type of the new man.

[\* Note here the difference of the corresponding phrase in Ephesians There the Christian is created after God in righteousness and true holiness. Here it is the new apprehensions of the divine life which knows God. It is our state, not God's creative act. Not that this contradicts the Ephesian view; on the contrary, "renewed here is another word from Ephesians It is that which is wholly new, never was there before. In Ephesians "renewed" is what is kept fresh and new.]

Other differences have disappeared: there remains but the old man, which we only acknowledge as dead, and the new man. To the latter Christ is all; so that there is none but He whom they see and whom they acknowledge, and He is in all believers They put on therefore as such, as elect, holy, beloved (Christ being their life), the character of Christ, mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another if offense has been given, even as Christ has done to us.\* Finally they put on love, the bond of perfectness, that which gives a divine character to all the qualities that have been enumerated, and that were manifested in Christ, and a divine check on taking amiable nature for divine grace, for divine love is holy.

[\* Remark here how patience and graciousness and longsuffering characterise the Christian. It is remarkable how this is the case everywhere. So must it be in a world like this. So was it in Christ. So in 1 Corinthians 13 the traits of charity are all subjective and of this character. Not that that is a definition of charity, but it is characteristic of it. Where these traits are wanting, charity is.]

And note here, that the putting on of these qualities is in the consciousness of the blessed place before God expressed in the words "elect of God, holy and beloved." It is as such. Nor can we do it otherwise. It is in the sense of



this wondrous favor that grace develops itself in our hearts. So in Ephesians, “as dear children.”

Several of these qualities may be resembled by things in nature; but the energy, the features, the bond of divine love, which acts in the sense of communion with God, are totally wanting in the latter; and this gives a character, a completeness, a righteousness of application, a perfection, a propriety, and an energy to the manifestation of these qualities, which love alone can give. For it is indeed God Himself who is there, acting in His nature which He has imparted to us. For He who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him. With regard to the state of the soul, there is a crown to this walk, wherewith they who follow it constantly are adorned. The peace of Christ reigns in the heart, that sweet and ineffable peace which nothing could disturb, though His spirit passed through everything to try it, for He walked ever with God. God has also called us to this; He is the God of peace. And here the apostle introduces the oneness of the body, not as to its privileges in Christ, but as to the fact that Christians are called to be together in the unity of which peace is the seal and the bond. And then there will be thanksgiving; for the soul is conscious of the love and the activity of God, and everything flows to it from that love.

But, besides peace and thanksgiving towards God, there is the development of life in the knowledge of what is revealed, its food and joy. This too is enjoyed in the activity of life and love towards others. The enjoyment of God and of that which is in His presence leads to this activity of the soul. When the latter is real, it is the joyful liberty of a nature that is itself in the activity of love that is natural to it, and which receives its energy from communion with God, according to His nature. The word of Christ unfolds all that is revealed to the soul as that in which it lives, and in which it expands itself, and is thus the rule, and active and directing power, because it is the expression of that nature, and the revelation of all its ways, and of its active energy in love in Him.

The apostle therefore exhorts that the word of Christ may dwell in them richly. This is the development, according to the perfection of God, of the new man, and the wisdom of God to form and direct him. Paul desires that Christians may fully realise this. It is by communion with the Lord, holding intercourse with Him, that it is done. The word being that in which

the wisdom is found; also according to this development the saints can teach and admonish each other.\* But in this case it is not only wisdom that we learn, and that is displayed in us, but affections in connection with Him in whom we have found this wisdom, so that these expressions of the life of Christ as true wisdom in the world, find their voice in our hearts in praise, in thanksgiving, in singing His excellency. All the intimate affections in which spiritual life develops itself express themselves, according to what we have learned: they flow from the Spirit of Christ, and are the expression of the soul's connection with Him, and of the feelings this produces in the heart. Christ in His Person, in the consciousness of His presence, as the object of our thoughts, and in the moral fruits proceeding thence, sustains the intercourse and the communications of the soul that is occupied with His praises.

[\* It is simpler to put the stop after "one another," and only a comma before "teaching."

But this consciousness of relationship with Christ, in the life which is of Him in us, applies to everything. Nothing is done without Him. If He is the life, all which that life does has Him for its end and object, as far as the heart is concerned. He is present as that which is the governing motive, and gives its character to our actions, and which preoccupies our heart in performing them. Everything relates to Him: we do not eat without Him; (how can we when He is our very life?) we do not drink without Him; what we say, what we do, is said and done in the name of the Lord Jesus. There is the sense of His presence; the consciousness that everything relates to Him, that we can do nothing — unless carnally — without Him, because the life which we have of Him acts with Him and in Him, does not separate from Him, and has Him for its aim in all things, even as water rises to the height from which it descended. This is what characterises the life of the Christian. And what a life! Through Him, dwelling in the consciousness of divine love, we give thanks to our God and Father.

Observe here that the christian life is not only characterised by certain subjective qualities which flow from Christ, but by its having Christ Himself for the aim and object of the heart and mind in all that we do in every respect. Christ personally reigns in, and is present to, the heart in everything.

To the inexperienced eye of man nature is often confounded with grace; but the intelligent consciousness of Christ as the heart's object, of His presence, of the seal of His approval when one thinks of Him, cannot be confounded with anything. There is nothing that resembles it, nothing that can appear to take its place. When He reveals Himself to our heart, and the heart walks with Him, and communes with Him in all things, and seeks only the light of His countenance, the seal of His favor on the soul in all things, then He is known, well known. There is none but He who thus communicates Himself to the soul when it walks in the way of His will, as expressed in the word.

After these great and important principles of the new life the apostle enters into the diverse relationships of life, giving warnings against that which would endanger them, by showing what the christian character of each one of them is. To the wife, obedience — affection was natural to her. “Thy desire shall be to thy husband.” To the husband, affection and kindness — his heart may be indifferent and hard. Children are to be obedient; fathers, gentle, in order that the children's affections may not be estranged from them, and that they may not be induced to seek that happiness in the world which they ought to find in the sanctuary of the domestic circle, which God has formed as a safeguard for those who are growing up in weakness; the precious home (if Christ is acknowledged) of kind affections, in which the heart is trained in the ties which God Himself has formed; and that in connection with the Lord, and which, by cherishing the affections, preserves from the passions and from self-will; and which, where its strength is rightly developed, has a power that, in spite of sin and disorder, awakens the conscience and engages the heart, keeping it away from evil and the direct power of Satan. For it is God's appointment.

I know indeed that another power is required to deliver the heart from sin and to keep it from sin. Nature, even as God created it, does not give eternal life, not does it restore innocence or purify the conscience. We may, by the energy of the Spirit, consecrate ourselves to God outside these relationships, renounce them even, if God should call us by more powerful obligations, as Christ teaches us in the gospel. The rights of Christ over man lost by sin are sovereign, absolute, and complete. He has redeemed him; and the redeemed one is no longer his own, but belongs to

Him who gave Himself for him. Where relationships exist, sin indeed has perverted everything, and corrupted the will; passions come in; but the relationships themselves are of God: woe to him who despises them as such! If grace has wrought and the new life exists, it acknowledges that which God has formed. It well knows that there is no good in man, it knows that sin has marred everything, but that which sin has marred is not itself sin. And where these relationships exist, the renunciation of self-will, death to sin, the bringing in of Christ, the operation of life in Him, restore their power; and if they cannot give back the character of innocence (lost for ever), they can make them a scene for the operations of grace, in which meekness, tenderness, mutual help, and self-denial, in the midst of the difficulties and sorrows which sin has introduced, lend them a charm and a depth (even as Christ did in every relationship) which innocence itself could not have presented. It is grace acting in the life of Christ in us which develops itself in them.

To be without natural affection is a sign of hopeless apostasy and estrangement from God, of the complete selfishness of the last days.

I am not drawing a false picture, or speaking poetically, as though the bright side were all; I only say that God has formed these relationships, and that whosoever fears God will respect them. Grace is requisite. They give occasion, through their intimacy itself, to all that is most painful, if grace does not act in them. The apostle warns us here of this danger. If the Lord is the bond in them, if our still closer union with Him forms the strength of our natural relationships, then grace reigns here as elsewhere; and, to those who stand in these relationships, they become a scene for the lovely display of the life of Christ.

It will be observed how the apostle consequently introduces Christ into them, and especially in regard to those who are subject in them, wives and children; in order to sanctify, by so exalted a motive, the obedience suited to their position. He does this still more where the tie is not of nature but one which has its origin in a sinful world — and from sin itself that between slaves and their masters. Grace does not set itself to change the state of the world and of society, but to lead souls to heaven by renewing them after the image of God. I doubt not that it has very much altered for the better the social condition of man; because, through bringing the

conscience immediately before the only true God whom it has revealed in His own perfections, and establishing by its authority that of the natural relationships in the human family, grace has had its effect upon that conscience even where the heart was not converted, and has furnished it with a rule in that which regards morality. But Christianity, as to its own doctrine, treats the world as alienated from God and lying in evil — man as the child of wrath, and lost.

Christ, the Son of God (who if He had been received could have put all things right, and who will hereafter by His kingdom establish righteousness and peace), was rejected by the world, and the friendship of the world is enmity against God. The state of man is treated in the gospel in a deeper way than in regard to his social condition. It is viewed with reference to the souls connection with God, and consequently with that which is eternal. God imparts a new life unto us, in order that we may enjoy those new relationships with Himself which redemption has gained for us. Now as Christ, while living, was the expression of the love and the omnipotent goodness of God in the midst of a fallen creation, so, being now rejected by the world (which thus condemned itself), Christ, who dwells by His grace, in the heart of one who has received life, becomes to that heart a source of happiness in communion with the love of God, which lifts it up and sets it above circumstances, be they what they may. The slave, in possessing Christ, is free in heart; he is the freed man of God Himself. The master knows that he himself has a Master, and the relationship in which he finds himself takes the form of the grace and love that reigns in the heart of him who in it exercises his authority.

But as I have said, to the poor slave Christ is especially presented as a resource. He may serve his master, whether a good or bad one, with faithfulness, meekness, and devotedness; because in so doing he serves the Lord Himself, and is conscious that he does so. He will have his reward there where nothing is forgotten that is done to glorify Christ, and where masters and slaves are all before Him who has no respect of persons.

Two principles act in the heart of the christian slave: his conscience in all his conduct is before God; the fear of God governs him, and not his master's eye. And he is conscious of his relationship to Christ, of the presence of Christ, which sustains and lifts him above everything. It is a

secret which nothing can take from him, and which has power over everything, because it is within and on high — Christ in him, the hope of glory. Yes, how admirably does the knowledge of Christ exalt everything that it pervades; and with what consoling power does it descend into all that is desolate and cast down, all that groans, all that is humbled in this world of sin!

Three times in these two verses, while holding their conscience in the presence of God, the apostle brings in the Lord, the Lord Christ, to fill the hearts of these poor slaves, and make them feel who it was to whom they rendered service. Such is Christianity.

The apostle ends his epistle with some important general exhortations.

He desires that the saints should continue through prayer in communion with God, and in the sense of their dependence on Him, conscious of His nearness to them, and of His readiness to hear them. For that which speaks to the heart for our walk is not enough; the soul must know its own relations with God, exercising itself in those relations; and it must receive directly from Him that which assures it of His love. There must be perseverance in this. We are in conflict with evil, which has a hold upon our own hearts if we are without the strength of God. We must therefore commune with God. We must watch therein with settled purpose of heart, not merely as an occasional thing; any one can cry out when he is in need. But the heart separated from the world and all that is of it occupies itself with God, with all that regards the glory of His name, according to the measure in which we are concerned in it. The conflict is carried on with a tender and freed spirit, having only His glory as the object, both in the assembly and in the individual walk. But thus one understands that God works, and that He does not forsake us, and thanksgiving is always mingled with the prayers we address to Him.

Paul felt his dependence on this blessing, and he asked for a share also in their prayers, that God might open his mouth, and that he might proclaim the gospel as he ought to do.

Now we are in a hostile world, in which hostility is easily awakened where it does not already exist openly, and in which offense is quickly taken at things wherein perhaps we neither saw nor intended evil. We must take

away the occasion even from those that seek it, and walk in wisdom with respect to them that are without.

How clearly the within and the without are here distinguished! Those within, whom God acknowledges, His family, His assembly — they are His own. Those without, they are the world, those who are not joined to the Lord. The distinction is plainly marked, but love is active towards them that are without, and, being itself in the enjoyment of communion with God, it is careful to do nothing that might prevent others from enjoying it.

But there was something more: they were to redeem the time. The natural man, taken up with his own affairs, and disinclined to serious things, gave christian love little opportunity to set grace and truth before him and make him care for his own soul, thus serving the Lord and using time in His name. The heart of man cannot always escape the influence of surrounding circumstances, which bear witness to his heart and conscience that he is under the dominion of sin, and already eating its bitter fruits here below — circumstances which bring to his conscience the remembrance of a too much forgotten God, which speak with the mighty voice of sorrow to a broken heart, glad at least to have a resource in God when his hand is pierced by the broken reed on which he leaned. God Himself acts upon man by these circumstances, and by every circumstance of life. One who is walking with the Lord knows how to avail himself of them. Satan may indeed deceive a man, but he cannot prevent God at all times from speaking to the heart. It is a happy thing so to walk with God that He can use us as His voice, when He would thus speak to poor sinners. Our speech ought always to be the expression of this separation from evil, this power of the presence of God which keeps us inwardly apart from it, so as to make that power felt by others; and that, in all the questionings which arise in the heart of man, wandering out of the way in confusion and darkness, and even leading others astray thereby, we may know how to give an answer which comes from the light and conveys light.

Tychicus was to carry the testimony of the interest which the apostle took in the welfare of the Colossians, and of his confidence in their interest in him. Paul bears witness to the love of others, and to their concern also in the progress of the gospel and the prosperity of the faithful.

Marcus, who had formerly drawn back from the toils of the work, receives a testimony here on the apostle's part and a still better one later (2 Timothy 4:11), for he had made himself useful to the apostle himself. Such is grace. The secret of the interest Barnabas took in him comes out here: he was nearly related to him. This dear servant of God was from Cyprus too. He went there and took Mark with him. The flesh and Judaism find their way everywhere. The power of the Spirit of God is requisite to raise us above, and set us beyond, their influence.

Demas receives no especial testimony. The apostle conveys his greetings, but is silent as to himself. Only in the epistle to Philemon is he named as a fellow-laborer of the apostle. Afterwards he forsook Paul. He was a brother: the apostle admits his claim but says nothing; he had nothing to say. "And Demas," for Paul's style is terribly cold.

We may observe that the epistle to the Ephesians was written at the same time, and sent by this same Tychicus. The one "from Laodicea" is, I doubt not, one that they were to receive from that assembly, written by Paul, and by which the saints at Colosse were to profit; possibly the epistle to the Ephesians, which he may have had communicated to the Laodiceans. Be this as it may, all that is said is that it was one of which the assembly at Laodicea were in possession, and by no means that it was directly addressed to them: rather the contrary. It is very possible that a letter, or a hundred letters, may have been written by Paul to others, which it was not in the purposes of God to preserve for the universal assembly: but here there is no proof that a letter had been written to the Laodiceans. Tychicus was the bearer of two: he may have been the bearer of three, one of which differed only in some details of application which might serve to confirm the Colossians without being in the main another divine communication for other days; but, I repeat, it does not appear to be so from that which is said here. It might be said, a letter "from Laodicea," because it was there, instead of a letter to Laodicea; but it is not the usual mode of expression. We have seen that the letter to the Ephesians is another communication of the Spirit of God. It has been preserved for us. We do not know whether that from Laodicea was the same, communicated by them to the Christians of that city; or another, which they were to send to the Colossians (an assembly in their vicinity) and which — adding nothing to the divine relations — has not been preserved for us.



It appears that Christians were not very numerous at Laodicea. The apostle salutes the brethren there. There were some who assembled in the house of one Nymphas; they were not in a case to have a letter addressed to them in particular: still the apostle does not forget them. But that which he says here is an almost certain proof that the apostle had not addressed any epistle to them. He would not have sent greetings through the Colossians to the brethren in Laodicea, if at the same time he had written a special epistle to the latter. The case is plain enough: there were brethren at Laodicea, but not in great numbers, and not in that distinct position which gave rise to an epistle. But this little assembly in the house of Nymphas was not to be forgotten; it should profit by the epistles addressed to other assemblies more considerable than itself, and whose condition required an epistle, or gave occasion to write one which epistles were transmitted to Laodicea, according to the apostle's order.

With regard to the epistle to the Colossians, it is not a supposition. The apostle commands them expressly to have it read in the assembly at Laodicea. The latter had also received another epistle from some other assembly, and the Colossians were to profit by it in the same manner. The two assemblies, which were near each other, were mutually to enjoy the spiritual favors that were granted them.

The apostle does not forget individuals even. Archippus receives a solemn exhortation to take heed to the ministry which the Lord had committed to him, and to fulfill his service.

The apostle had not seen these assemblies (chap. 2:1).

# 1 THESSALONIANS

We find in the epistles to the Thessalonians, and especially the first (for in the second it was already needful to guard that freshness from the perfidious attacks of the enemy), the condition and the hope of the Christian as such in this world all its freshness. These two epistles are the first that Paul wrote, unless we except that to the Galatians, the date of which is uncertain. Already long occupied with the work, it is only when this work was considerably advanced, that in watching over it he guards it by means of his writings — writings as we have seen, various in character, according to the state of the churches, and according to the divine wisdom which, by this means, deposited in the scriptures that which would be necessary for all ages.

Newly converted, the Christians at Thessalonica suffered much from the persecution of the world — a persecution which the Jews of that place had already previously stirred up against Paul himself. Happy at the gracious work there, and rejoicing in the state of his dear children in the faith (a testimony to which was born everywhere, even by the world), the apostle opens his heart; and the Holy Ghost sets forth by his mouth what that christian condition was upon the earth which was the source of his joy in the case of the Thessalonians; and what the hope which threw its light upon the believer's existence, shining around him through his whole life, and illuminating his path in the wilderness. In a word the christian character is unfolded to our eyes with all its motives and its joys, and that in connection with the testimony of God and the hope which is our strength in bearing it.

We all know that the doctrine of the coming of Christ, which universally accompanies the work of the Spirit that attaches our hearts to Him in the first spring of a new life, is specially presented to us in these two epistles. And it is not merely formally taught as a doctrine; it is linked with every spiritual relationship of our souls, it is displayed in all the circumstances of the Christian's life. We are converted in order to wait for Him. The joy of the saints in the fruits of their labors is realised in His presence. It is at the coming of Christ that holiness has all its value, its measure being seen

in that which is then manifested. It is the consolation when Christians die. It is the unexpected judgment of the world. It is unto the coming of Christ that God preserves His own in holiness, and blameless. We shall see these points set forth in detail in the different chapters of the first epistle. We only point them out here. In general we shall find that personal relationships, and the expectation of His appearing, have a remarkable and enlivening freshness in this epistle in every respect. The Lord is present to the heart — is its object; and christian affections spring up in the soul, causing the fruits of the Spirit to abound.

In these two epistles only is an assembly said to be “in God the Father,” that is to say, planted in this relationship, having its moral existence — its mode of being — in it. The life of the assembly developed itself in the communion that flowed from this relationship. The Spirit of adoption characterises it. With the affection of little children the Thessalonians knew the Father. Thus John says, when speaking of the little children in Christ, “I write unto you because ye have known the Father.” It is the first introduction into the position of liberty in which Christ has placed us — liberty before God and in communion with Him. Precious position! to be as children to One who loves as a Father, with all the liberty and tender affection of that relationship, according to divine perfection. For here it is not the adaptation of Christ’s human experience to the wants in which He acquired it (precious as that grace is); it is our introduction into the unmingled enjoyment of the light, and of the divine affections displayed in the character of the Father. It is our communion, tender and confiding but pure, with Him whose love is the source of all blessing. Nor do I doubt that, freshly brought out of heathenism as the Thessalonians were, the apostle refers to their knowledge of the one true God the Father in contrast with their idols.

The apostle, in declaring (as was his custom) that which he felt respecting them — the aspect in which they appeared to his heart and mind, speaks neither of gifts, as to the Corinthians, nor of the grand features of an exaltation that embraced the Lord and all saints, as to the Ephesians and even to the Colossians (with the addition of that which their state required); nor of the brotherly affection and fellowship of love which the Philippians had manifested in their connection with himself; nor of a faith that existed apart from his labors, and in communion with which he hoped

to refresh himself, adding to it that which is abundant gifts enabled him to impart to them, as he writes to the Romans whom he had not yet seen.

Here it is the life itself of the Christian in its first fresh impressions, in its intrinsic qualities, as it developed itself by the energy of the Holy Ghost on earth, the life of God here below in them, which he remembers in his prayers with so much satisfaction and joy. Three great principles, he tells the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13) form the basis, and ever abide as the foundation of this life — faith, hope and love. Now these three were the powerful and divine motives of the life of the Thessalonians. This life was not merely a habit; it flowed, in its outward activities, from immediate communion with its source. These activities were quickened and maintained by divine life, and by keeping the eye constantly fixed upon the object of faith. There was work, and labor, and endurance. There were the same in Ephesus, as we see it in Revelation 2. But here it was a work of faith, labor undertaken by love, endurance fed by hope. Faith, hope, and love are, we have seen, the springs of Christianity in this world. The work, the labor, the endurance continued at Ephesus, but ceased to be characterised by these great and mighty principles. The habit continued, but the communion was wanting. They had forsaken their first love.

The first to the Thessalonians is the expression of the living power in which the assembly is planted: Ephesus, in Revelation 2, of its first departure from that state.

May our work be a work of faith, drawing its strength, its existence even, from our communion with God our Father! May it be, each moment, the fruit of the realisation of that which is invisible, of the life which lives in the certainty, the immutable certainty, of the word! May it thus bear the impress of the grace and truth that came by Jesus Christ, and be a testimony to it.

May our labor in service be the fruit of love, not performed merely as duty and obligation, although it is this, if we know that it is before us to be done!

May the patience that we must have, in order to go through this wilderness, be, not the necessity we feel because the path is before us, but

an endurance sustained by the hope that belongs to our view of Jesus by faith, and that is waiting for Him!

These principles, faith, hope, and love, form our character as Christians:\* but it cannot, and ought not to, be formed in us without having objects. Accordingly the Spirit presents them here. They have a twofold character. The heart rests by faith in Jesus, waits for Him, counts upon Him, links itself with Him in its walk. He has walked here below, He represents us in heaven, He watches over us as the good Shepherd. He loves His own; He nourishes and cherishes them: our faith and our hope keep Him always in view. The conscience is before God our Father; it is not in the spirit of fear: there is no uncertainty as to our relationship. We are the children of a Father who loves us perfectly; but we are before God. His light has authority and power in the conscience: we walk in the sense that His eye is upon us, in love but upon us. And light makes everything manifest. It judges all that might weaken the sweet and peaceful realisation of the presence of God, and our communion with Jesus, and our confidence in Him, the intimacy of the intercourse between our souls and the Lord. These two principles are of all importance for abiding peace, for the progress of our souls. Without them the soul flags. The one sustains confidence, the other keeps us in the light with a good conscience. Without the latter, faith (not to say more) loses its liveliness; without the former, the conscience becomes legal, and we lose spiritual strength, light and ardor.

[\* They are found oftener in Paul's writings than is thought; as 1 Thessalonians 5:8, and Colossians 1:4, 5. In 2 Thessalonians 1:3 we have faith and love, but he has to clear up their thoughts as to hope.]

The apostle reminds them also of the means used by God to produce this condition, that is, the gospel, the word, brought in power and in much assurance to the soul by the Holy Ghost. The word had power in their heart — came to it as the word of God; the Spirit Himself revealed Himself in it, giving the consciousness of His presence; and the consequence of this was the full assurance of the truth in all its power, in all its reality. The apostle's life, his whole conduct, confirmed the testimony which he boreformed a part of it. Accordingly (it is always the case) the fruit of his labors answered in character to him who labored; the Christianity of the Thessalonians resembled that of Paul. It was like the walk of the Lord

Himself whom Paul followed so closely. It was “in much affliction,” for the enemy could not bear so plain a testimony, and God granted this grace to such a testimony, and “with joy of the Holy Ghost.”

Happy testimony to the power of the Spirit working in the heart! When this is so, everything becomes testimony to others. They see that there is in Christians a power of which they are ignorant, motives which they have not experienced, a joy which they may scoff at but which they do not possess; a conduct which strikes them, and which they admire, although they do not follow it; a patience which shows the impotence of the enemy in striving against a power that endures everything, and that rejoices in spite of all his efforts. What can we do with those who allow themselves to be killed without becoming less joyful, nay, whom it makes more so; who are above all our motives when left to themselves, and who, if oppressed, possess their souls in perfect joy in spite of all our opposition; and who are unconquered by torments, finding in these only an occasion for bearing a stronger testimony that Christians are beyond our power? At peace, life is all of it a testimony; death, even in torture, is still more so. Such is the Christian, where Christianity exists in its true power, in its normal condition according to God — the word (of the gospel) and the presence of the Spirit, reproduced in the life, in a world estranged from God.

Thus it was with the Thessalonians; and the world, in spite of itself, became an additional witness to the power of the gospel. An ensample to believers in other places, they were the subject of report and conversation to the world, which was never weary of discussing this phenomenon, so new and so strange, of people who had given up all that governed the human heart, all to which it was subject, and worshipped one only living and true God, to whom even the natural conscience bore testimony. The gods of the heathen were the gods of the passions, not of the conscience. And this gave a living reality, an actuality, to the position of Christians and to their religion. They waited for His Son from heaven.

Happy indeed were those Christians whose walk and whole existence made of the world itself a witness for the truth, who were so distinct in their confession, so consistent in their life, that an apostle did not need to

speak of that which he had preached, of that which he had been among them. The world spoke of it for him and for them.

A few words on the testimony itself, which, simple as it may be, is of great importance, and contains principles of great moral depth. It forms the basis of the whole life, and of all the christian affections also, that are unfolded in the epistle, which, besides this development, contains only a special revelation of the circumstances and the order of the coming of Christ to call His people to Himself, and of the difference between that event and the day of the Lord to judge the world, although this latter follows on the former.

That which the apostle points out, as the testimony born by the faithful walk of the Thessalonians, contained three principal subjects: 1st, they had forsaken their idols to serve the living and true God; 2nd, they were waiting for His Son from heaven, whom He had raised from among the dead; 3rd, the Son was a safeguard from the wrath which was to be revealed.

An immense fact — simple but of vast import — characterises Christianity. It gives us a positive object; and this object is nothing less than God Himself. Human nature may discover the folly of that which is false. We scorn false gods and graven images; but we cannot get beyond ourselves, we cannot reveal anything to ourselves. One of the most renowned names of antiquity is pleased to tell us, that all would go well if men followed nature (it is manifest that they could not rise above it); and, if fact, he would be in the right if man were not fallen. But to require man to follow nature is a proof that he is fallen, that he has degraded himself below the normal state of that nature. He does not follow it in the walk that suits its constitution. All is in disorder. Self-will carries him away and acts in his passions. Man has forsaken God, and has lost the power and center of attraction that kept him in his place and everything in his own nature in its place. Man cannot recover himself, he cannot direct himself; for, apart from God, there is nothing but self-will that guides man. There are many objects that furnish occasion for the acting of the passions and the will; but there is no object which, as a center, gives him a regular, constant, and durable moral position in relationship with that object, so that his character should bear its stamp and value. Man must either have a

moral center, capable of forming him as a moral being, by attracting him to itself and filling his affections, so that he shall be the reflex of that object; or he must act in self-will, and then he is the sport of his passions; or, which is the necessary consequence, he is the slave of any object that takes possession of his will. A creature, who is a moral being, cannot subsist without an object. To be self-sufficing is the characteristic of God.

The equilibrium which subsisted in the unconsciousness of good and evil is lost. Man no longer walks as man, having nothing in his mind outside his normal condition, outside that which he possessed; not having a will, or, which comes to the same thing, having a will that desired nothing more than it possessed, but that gratefully enjoyed all that was already appropriated to its nature, and especially the companionship of a being like himself, a help who had his own nature, and who answered to his heartblessing God for everything.

Now man wills. While he has lost that which formed the sphere of his enjoyment, there is in him an activity which seeks, which is become unable to rest without aiming at, something farther; which, has already, as will, thrown itself into a sphere that it does not fill, in which it lacks intelligence to apprehend all that is there and power to realise even that which it desires. Man, and all that has been his, no longer suffices man as enjoyment. He still needs an object. This object will either be above or below the man. If it be below, he degrades himself below himself; and it is this indeed which has taken place. He no longer lives according even to nature (as he to whom I have alluded says), a state which the apostle has described in the beginning of the epistle to the Romans with all the horrors of the plain truth. If this object be above himself and below God, there is still nothing to govern his nature, nothing that puts him morally in his place. A good being could not take this place to exclude God from it. If a bad object gains it, he becomes to the man a God, who shuts out the true God, and degrades man in his highest relationship — the worst of all degradations. This too has taken place. And since these beings are but creatures, they only can govern man by that which exists, and by that which acts upon him. This is to say, they are the gods of his passions. They degrade the idea of the Divinity: they degrade the practical life of humanity into slavery to the passions (which are never satisfied, and which invent evil when they are surfeited with excess in that which is



natural to them) and are thus left without resource. Such in fact was the condition of man under Paganism.

Man, and above all, man having knowledge of good and evil, should have God for his object; and as an object that his heart can entertain with pleasure, and on which his affections can be exercised: otherwise he is lost. The gospel — Christianity — has given him this. God, who fills all things, who is the source of, in whom is centered, all blessing, all good — God, who is all love, who has all power, who embraces everything in His knowledge, because everything (except the forsaking of Himself) is but the fruit of His mind and will — God has revealed Himself in Christ to man, in order that his heart, occupied with Him, with perfect confidence in His goodness, may know Him, may enjoy His presence? and reflect His character.

The sin and misery of man have but lent occasion to an infinitely more complete development of what this God is, and of the perfection of His nature, in love, in wisdom, and in power. But we are here considering only the fact, that He has given Himself to man for an object. Nevertheless, although the misery of man has but given room for a much more admirable revelation of God, yet God Himself must have an object worthy of Himself to be the subject of His purposes, and in order to unfold all His affections. This object is the glory of His Son — His Son Himself. A being of an inferior nature could not have been this to Him, although God can glorify Himself in His grace to such a one. The object of the affections, and the affections that are exercised with regard to it, are necessarily correlative. Thus God has displayed His sovereign and immense grace with regard to that which was the most wretched the most unworthy, the most necessitous; and He has displayed all the majesty of His being, all the excellence of His nature, in connection with an object in whom He could find all His delight, and exhibit all that He is in the glory of His nature. But it is as man — marvelous truth in the eternal counsels of God! — that this object of God the Father's delight has taken His place in this glorious revelation by which God makes Himself known to His creatures. God has ordained and prepared man for this. Thus the heart that is taught by the Spirit knows God as revealed in this immense grace, in the love that comes down from the throne of God to the ruin and misery of the sinner; he finds himself, in Christ, in the knowledge and in the enjoyment of the love which

God has for the object of His eternal delight, who also is worthy of being so; of the communications by which He testifies that love (John 17:7, 8); and finally, of the glory which is its public demonstration before the universe. This latter part of our ineffable blessedness is the subject of Christ's communications at the end of John's Gospel (chaps. 14, 16, and, in particular 17).\*

[\* Compare Proverbs 8:30, 31 and Luke 2:14, where read, "good pleasure in men." It is beautiful to see the angels unjealously celebrating it. Love downwards in grace is great according to the misery and unworthiness of the object; upwards as the affection of the soul according to the worthiness; see both in Christ, Ephesians 5:2. In both in Christ self is wholly given up. He gave, not sought, Himself. The law takes self as measure as to the neighbor, and supposes him on the same footing. There is no love downwards.]

From the moment that the sinner is converted and believes the gospel, and (to complete his state, I must add) is sealed with the Holy Ghost, now that the blessed Lord has wrought I redemption, he is introduced — as to the principle of his life — into this position, into these relationships with God. He is perhaps but a child; but the Father whom he knows, the love into which he has entered, the Savior on whom his eyes are opened, are the same whom he will enjoy when he shall know as he is known. He is a Christian; he is turned from idols to God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.

We may observe, that the subject here is not the power which converts, nor the source of life. Of these other passages speak clearly. Here it is the character of the life in its manifestation. Now this depends on its objects. Life is exercised and unfolded in connection with its objects, and thus characterises itself. The source from which it flows makes it capable of enjoying it; but an intrinsic life which has no object on which it depends is not the life of a creature. Such life as that is the prerogative of God. This shows the folly of those who would have a subjective life, as they say, without its having a positively objective character; for this subjective state depends on the object with which it is occupied. It is the characteristic of God to be the source of His own thoughts without an object — to be, and to be self-sufficing (because He is perfection, and the center and source of everything), and to create objects unto Himself, if He would have any without Himself. In a word, although receiving a life from God which is

capable of enjoying Him, the moral character of man cannot be formed in him without an object that imparts it to him.

Now God has given Himself to us for an object, and has revealed Himself in Christ. If we occupy ourselves with God in Himself (supposing always that He had thus revealed Himself), the subject is too vast. It is an infinite joy; but in that which is simply infinite there is something wanting to a creature, although it is his highest prerogative to enjoy it. It is necessary to him on the one hand, in order that he may be in his place, and that God may have His place in regard to him, and on the other hand that which exalts him so admirably. It must be so; and it is the privilege given unto us, and given unto us in a priceless intimacy, for we are children, and we dwell in God, and God in us; but with this in itself there is a certain weight upon the heart in the sense of God alone. We read of “a far more exceeding and abundant weight\* of glory.” It must be so: His majesty must be maintained when we think of Him as God, His authority over the conscience. The heart — God has so formed it — needs something which will not lower its affections, but which may have the character of companion and friend, at least to which it has access in that character.

[\* Weight and glory are the same word in Hebrew.]

It is this which we have in Christ, our precious Savior. He is an object near to us. He is not ashamed to call us brethren. He has called us friends; all that He has heard from His Father He has made known to us. Is He then a means of our eyes being turned away from God? On the contrary, it is in Him that God is manifested, in Him that even the angels see God. It is He who, being in the bosom of the Father, reveals to us His God and Father in this sweet relationship, and as He knows Him Himself. And not only this, but He is in the Father, and the Father in Him, so that He who has seen Him has seen the Father. He reveals God to us, instead of turning us away from Him. In grace He has already revealed Him, and we wait for the revelation of glory in Him. Already also on the earth, from the moment that He was born the angels celebrated the good pleasure of God in man, for the object of His eternal delight had become a man. And now He has accomplished the work which makes possible the introduction of others, of sinners, into the enjoyment with Himself of this favor of God. Once enemies, “we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son.”

It is thus that God has reconciled us to Himself. By faith thus knowing God, we “turn from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven.” The living and true God is the object of our joyful service. His Son, whom we know, who knows us, who will have us to be where He is, who has identified us with His own glory and His glory with us, He who is a glorified man for ever and firstborn among many brethren, is the object of our expectation. We expect Him from heaven, for our hopes are there, and there the seat of our joy.

We have the infinity of a God of love, the intimacy and the glory of Him who has taken part in all our infirmities, and, without sin, has born all our sins. What a portion is ours!

But there was another side of the truth. Creatures are responsible; and, however great His love and His patience, God cannot allow evil nor contempt of His authority: if He did, all would be confusion and misery. God Himself would lose His place. There is a judgment; there is wrath to come. We were responsible; we have failed. How then shall we enjoy God and the Son in the way that I have spoken of?

Here comes in the application of the third truth of which the apostle speaks: “which delivered us from the wrath to come.” The work of Christ has perfectly sheltered us from this wrath; He took our place in responsibility on the cross to put away sin for us by the sacrifice of Himself.

These then are the three great elements of christian life. We serve the living and the true God, having forsaken our idols outward or inward. We expect Jesus for glory; for this sight of God makes us feel what this world is, and we know Jesus. As to our sins and our conscience, we are perfectly cleansed; we fear nothing. The life and walk of the Thessalonians was a testimony to these truths.

Having established these great principles, the apostle, with an open and overflowing heart, appeals to his whole walk among them as a proof of his having walked in the same spirit as in their own case he was rejoicing in. It was not that he exhorted others, while availing himself of their affection, for his own advantage. It was not that he encouraged them to endure afflictions, without having courage himself to undergo the same. Ill-treated

and insulted at Philippi, he was bold in God to renew his attacks on the kingdom of darkness at Thessalonica, and that with great energy. He had not used flattering words to win them; he had set the truth before them, as being himself the servant of God. He had worked with his own hands that he might not be burdensome to them. All was before God in the light and by the energy of the Holy Ghost, and in a spirit of devotedness; even as he desired that they should walk as they knew he had walked among them, as holily, justly, and unblameably; as also he had exhorted them, with all affection and tenderness, to walk worthy of God, who had called them unto His own kingdom and glory.

We see again in this expression the close relationship of the Christian, in his individual character, with God. He has his portion in God's own kingdom and glory, and his conduct should become such a position. Here it is his own position in relationship with God, as before it was his relationship with God and the Lord Jesus.

The apostle then speaks of the means by which this world of new thoughts was acquired by the Christian. It was that God had spoken to reveal Himself and His counsels. God had committed the gospel to Paul (chap. 2:4), and he had acted as being in the presence of God, and responsible to Him.

The Thessalonians also, on their part, had received the word, not as the word of Paul, but as the word of God Himself addressed to them by the mouth of Paul. It is interesting, as for us also a serious thought, to observe that (with regard to the manifestation of the power of God down here), although the work is of God, the fruit of His servants' labors answers to the character and depth of that labor itself. Thus the bonds of grace are established, and communion; there is mutual understanding. The work manifests the workman. The laborer rejoices in that which his heart had desired for the souls that are the fruit of his labor; and these know how to appreciate the walk and the work of the laborer, acknowledging the power of grace in him who was the means of bringing them into this position; and the one and the others, knowing God, rejoice in the fellowship of His grace.

Paul was very largely with God in his own soul and in his work. The Thessalonians had in consequence received the word in the same power;

and they, with him, were thus in communion with God according to that power and that intimacy.

We see here, in passing, the Jews deprived of this relationship with God, the remnant of that people received, and suffering from the enmity of the mass. The elect from among the Gentiles awakened, on their part, the hostility of their fellow-countrymen by the testimony which they bore against the prince of this world in their christian walk, and by their confession of a heavenly Christa Christ whom the world had rejected.

The religion of the Jews had become pure jealousy of others. The pretension to the exclusive possession of religious privileges — very precious when they enjoyed it with God as a testimony of His favor — was nothing but a spring of hatred, when God in the fullness of His sovereign grace chose to bless others who had a right to nothing. By this exclusive pretension they denied the rights of God, who had formerly chosen them as a people; they denied His grace, according to which He acted towards sinners, and which would have been the source of better blessings for themselves. But meantime their refusal to come in had transferred the scene of our hopes and our joys from earth to heaven, where we know the Lord, and where He will remain until He comes to assert His claims over the earth. Before He asserts them, He will take us to Himself.

Meanwhile the word of God is the source of our confidence — the revelation of glory, of truth, and of love. It is mighty in them that believe. The Jews are set aside. By their opposition to grace towards the Gentiles, they had taken the position of enmity against God in grace, and wrath was come upon them to the uttermost. It was not yet executed; but they had put themselves in this position. It was not only that they had broken the law, they had already killed their prophets who were sent to them in grace; they had already slain the Christ, Jesus the Lord. Sovereign grace alone could bring in a remedy. This they resisted; because, according to that grace, God was good to the Gentiles, and granted to them, at the same time as to themselves, better privileges than those which they had forfeited. Wrath therefore was finally come upon them as a nation. Christians were now in the enjoyment of better privileges in place of the Jews.

It is not here the moment for explaining the future dealings of God with the remnant of that people. The apostle speaks of the people, in order to show that the only ones in relation with God were Christians — those who had received the word. It was the reception of the word by faith, and nothing else, which brought souls really into relationship with God. Hereditary privileges were found to be, in their nature, opposition to grace and sovereignty, and thus to the character and rights of God Himself; for God is sovereign, and God is love.

The word reveals grace; it is obeyed by believing it. And, brought into relationship with God, the Christian walks in communion and in His ways, and waits for the Son, in whom He has revealed Himself to men. This is the fruit of that which the Christian has received through believing — an efficacious principle of life, and a light from God for the way.

The apostle blessed God that it was thus with the Thessalonians; and, having made this point clear, he returns to the joy of his communion with them in the positive blessing which the revelation of God in their hearts by the word had brought them. He would gladly have seen them to enjoy this communion in intercourse with them face to face; but as long as it was by the word only that the knowledge of God was obtained — in a word by faith — as long as the Lord was absent, another result flowed from this fact; namely, that these joys were mingled with conflict — conflict however, which, although to the eye of man interrupting enjoyment, made it more sweet, more real, preserved its heavenly character, and made the Lord Himself, from whom they could not be separated, the center, the common point in which hearts were united, with the consciousness that they were in the wilderness, and that they were awaiting a scene and a time in which evil and the enemy's power would no longer be, but where Christ would be all. Joyful hope, holy happiness, powerful link of the heart to Christ! When He shall be all, our joy will be complete, and all saints will possess it. Paul wished to have seen them again, and had so even twice, but Satan hindered it. The time should come when he would fully enjoy both them and his labor among them, by seeing them in full possession of glory at the coming of Christ.

In the apostle himself, when at Thessalonica, christian life was fully developed in love and in holiness. He had been among them in tenderness,

as a mother cherishes her children; ready to impart not only the gospel to them, but even his own life, so dear were they to him. He had been at the same time holy and without blame in all his conduct. What energy of life and love springing up by the power of God, regardless of all the consequences save the blessing of the elect and the glory of God! This is true christian life. The heart, not filled with questionings through unbelief but strong in faith, counts on God in order to serve God. Thus love is free, beside oneself for God, prudent and full of consideration only for the good of others. And what bonds this creates! Persecution only hastens the work by compelling to go elsewhere, when perhaps the laborer would be tempted to enjoy the fruits of his labor in the society. of those who had been blessed through him (compare chap. 2:2). Though absent, the apostle's heart was still bound to them; he remembered his beloved ones; he prayed for them; he blessed God for the grace bestowed on them; assuring himself with joy, when he thought of it, their portion in glory as the elect of God (chap. 1:3, 4; 2:13).

The bond remained firm; and, the way to present enjoyment personal communion being obstructed by the devices of Satan (by permission of God), his heart rose higher, and sought the full satisfaction of the want produced in it by love, in the moment when a Christ present in His power should have removed all obstacles and accomplished the purposes of God with respect to the saints; when His love should have born all its precious fruits in them; and when Paul and his dear children in the faith should enjoy together all that grace and the power of the Spirit should have wrought in them. Unable for the moment to satisfy the desires of his heart by seeing them, it was to that hour that Paul looked. And observe that, if he does so, it is because his heart was already filled with it for himself. The power of the Spirit, acting in accordance with the truth, always leads the heart to that hour. It impels the heart to labor in love in the midst of this world, causes thus the opposition of the darkness of this world to the light (whether on the part of man or of the prince of darkness) to be realised, and makes us always feel the need of that day of light, when evil shall no longer be present to hinder the happiness of the new man in his enjoyment of that which is good, in his communion with those dear to God, and; above all, in the enjoyment of the presence of his glorified Savior, who has



loved him, and who (for the exercise of his faith) is at present hidden from him.

It is He who is the source and object of all these affections, who sustains and nourishes them, who attracts them ever to Himself by His perfections and by His love, and, in the sorrows of the christian life, carries the heart onward thus to the day of our being with Himself, to the day of His coming, when the heart will be free to occupy itself with all that binds us to Him without interruption. This thought of His presence has the mastery, when the heart is fresh in the divine joy of redemption. We find this here. We are converted to wait for Him (chap. 1); we shall enjoy the communion of saints, and the fruit of our labors when He returns (chap. 2); that day gives its force and its measure to our thoughts respecting holiness (chap. 3); it destroys the anguish of heart which would otherwise accompany the death of the saints (chap. 4); it is for that day we are kept (chap. 5). The coming of the Lord, the presence of Jesus, fills therefore the believer's heart, when life is springing up in its freshness — fills it with a joyous hope, the fulfillment of which shines bright before our eyes, there where all our desires will be accomplished.

To return to the end of chapter 2, the link which Satan sought to break by interrupting its enjoyment was but the rather strengthened by being connected with the coming of the Lord. The current of the Spirit, against which he had been allowed to set up this dike, though turned from its natural bed, could not be stopped, for its waters ever flow; they gushed out in waves that enriched all around them, taking their course towards that sea which contained the fullness of those waters and fed the source from which they sprang.

It should be observed here, that the special fruits of our labors are not lost; they are found again at the coming of Christ. Our chief personal joy is to see the Lord Himself and to be like Him. This is the portion of all saints; but there are particular fruits in connection with the work of the Spirit in us and by us. At Thessalonica the spiritual energy of the apostle had brought a number of souls to God and to wait for Jesus, and into a close union in the truth with Himself. This energy would be crowned at the coming of Christ by the presence of these believers in the glory as the fruit of his labors. God would thus crown the apostle's work by bearing a

striking testimony to its faithfulness in the presence of all these saints in glory; and the love which had wrought in Paul's heart would be satisfied by seeing its object in glory and in the presence of Jesus. They would be his glory and joy. This thought drew yet closer the bonds that united them, and comforted the apostle in the midst of his toils and sufferings.

Now this forced removal of the apostle as the chief laborer, without weakening the bond between him and the disciples, formed other links which would consolidate and strengthen the assembly, knitting it together by that which every joint supplied. This is connected (all things are but the instruments of the power and wisdom of God) with the circumstances of which the Acts of the Apostles give us the principal details.

After the persecutions excited by the Jews the apostle made a short stay at Thessalonica, and was then obliged to leave that city and go to Berea. Even there the Jews of Thessalonica followed him, and influenced those of Berea, so that the Berean brethren had to provide for his safety. The person to whom they committed him brought him to Athens; Silas and Timotheus remained at Berea for the moment, but soon at his command rejoined him at Athens. Meantime a violent persecution raged against the Christians at Thessalonica, a city of importance, in which, as it appears, the Jews had already exercised a considerable measure of influence over the heathen population — an influence that was undermined by the progress of Christianity, which the Jews in their blindness rejected.

The apostle, learning this state of things from Silas and Timotheus, was concerned at the danger his new converts ran in being shaken in faith by the difficulties that beset their path while they were still young in the faith. His affection would not allow him to rest without putting himself in communication with them, and already from Athens he had sent Timotheus to inquire into their condition, and to establish their hearts by reminding them that while yet with them he had told them these things would happen. During his absence Paul left Athens and went to Corinth, where Timotheus again comforted him by the good tidings he brought from Thessalonica, and the apostle resumed his labors at Corinth with renewed energy and courage (see Acts 18:5).

On the arrival of Timotheus Paul wrote this letter. Timotheus had informed him. of the good state of the Thessalonian Christians — that

they held fast the faith, that they greatly desired to see the apostle, and that they walked together in love. In the midst of his sorrows, and of the opposition of men — in a word, of the afflictions of the gospel — the apostle's spirit is refreshed by these tidings. He is himself strengthened, for if the faith of the laborer is the means of blessing to souls, and in general the measure of the outward character of the work, the faith of the Christians who are the fruit of his labors, and who correspond to it, is in return a source of strength and encouragement to the laborer; even as their prayers are a great means of blessing to him.

Love finds in their spiritual welfare both its food and its joy; faith, that which sustains and strengthens it. The word of God is felt in it. "I live," says the apostle, "if ye stand fast in the Lord. What thanks," he adds, "can we render to God for you, for all the joy wherewith we rejoice for your sakes before God?" Beautiful and affecting picture of the effect of the operation of the Spirit of God, delivering souls from the corruption of the world, and producing the purest affections, the greatest self-renunciation for the sake of others, the greatest joy in their happiness — divine joy, realised before God Himself, and the value of which was appreciated in His presence by the spiritual heart that abode in it, the heart which, on the part of that God of love, had been the means of its existence.

What a bond is the bond of the Spirit! How selfishness is forgotten, and disappears in the joy of such affections! The apostle, animated by this affection, which increased instead of growing weary by its exercise, and by the satisfaction it received in the happiness of others, desires so much the more, from the Thessalonians being thus sustained, to see them again; not now for the purpose of strengthening them, but to build upon that which was already so established, and to complete their spiritual instruction by imparting that which was yet lacking to their faith. But he is, and he ought to be, a laborer and not a master (God makes us feel this), and he depends entirely on God for his work, and for the edification of others. In fact years passed away before he saw the Thessalonians again. He remained a long time at Corinth, where the Lord had much people; he revisited Jerusalem, then all Asia Minor where he had labored earlier; thence he went to Ephesus, where he abode nearly three years; and after that he saw the Thessalonians again, when he left that city to go to Corinth, taking his

journey by the way of Macedonia, in order not to visit Corinth before the restoration of the Christians there to order.

“God himself” — it is thus that the apostle’s desire and his submission to the will of God expresses itself — ”God himself direct our way unto you.” His desire is not vague. He refers to God as to his Father, the source of all these holy affections, Him who holds the place of Father to us, and orders all things with a view to the good of His children, according to that perfect wisdom which embraces all things and all His children at once. “Our God and Father himself,” the apostle says. But there is another consideration — not, assuredly, in opposition to this, for God is one, but which has another and less individual character: and he adds — ”And our Lord Jesus Christ.” Christ is Son over God’s house, and besides joy and blessing and individual affections, there was the progress, the welfare, and the development of the whole assembly to be considered. These two parts of Christianity act assuredly upon each other.

Where the operation of the Spirit is full and unhindered, the well-being of the assembly and the individual affections are in harmony. If anything is lacking in the one, God uses the failure itself to act powerfully on the other. If the assembly as a whole is weak, individual faith is exercised in a special manner, and more immediately upon God Himself. There are no Elijahs and Elishas in the reign of Solomon. On the other hand the watchful care of the assembly by those divinely engaged in it is the true energy of its spiritual organisation, strengthens the life, and re-awakens the spiritual affections of its slumbering members. But the two things are different. Therefore the apostle adds to “our God and Father,” “and our Lord Jesus Christ,” who, as we have said, according to Hebrews 3, is Son over His house. It is a blessing that our path depends on the love of a Father, who is God Himself, acting according to the tender affections expressed by that name; and, as to the well-being of the assembly, that it depends on the government of a Lord like Jesus, who loves it with a perfect love: and who, although He took such a place, is the God who created all things, the Man who has all power in heaven and on earth, to whom Christians are the objects of incessant and faithful care — care which He expends in order to bring the assembly finally unto Himself in glory according to the counsels of God.

\* Such then was the apostle's first wish, and such were they with regard to whom he formed it. Meanwhile he must leave his beloved Thessalonians to the immediate care of the Lord on whom he depended (compare Acts 20:32). To that his heart turns. May God direct my way to come to you. "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all.?" And his heart could present its affection for them, as the pattern of that which they ought to feel for others. This power of love maintains the heart in the presence of God, and makes it find its joy in the light of His presence, and earnestly desire that all saints may be in His presence, their hearts fitted for it and there. For God is love, and the exercise of love in the Christian's heart (fruit of the presence and the operation of the Spirit) is in fact the effect of the presence of God; and at the same time it makes us feel His presence, so that it keeps us before Him and maintains sensible communion in the heart. Love may suffer and thereby prove its strength, but we are speaking of the spontaneous exercise of love towards the objects which God presents to it.

[\* It is well here to recall that, though Christ is Son over God's house, as Lord He is not Lord over the assembly but over individuals. Besides this, He is in a general sense Lord of all. But His action towards individuals ministers to the well-being of the assembly.]

Now, being thus the development of the divine nature in us, and the sustainment of our hearts in communion with God Himself, love is the bond of perfectness, the true means of holiness, when it is real. The heart is kept, far away from the flesh and its thoughts, in the pure light of the presence of God, which the soul thus enjoys. For this reason the apostle prays, while waiting to give them more light, that the Lord would increase love in them, in order to establish their hearts unblamable in holiness before God even our Father in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. Here we find again the two great principles of which I spoke at the end of chapter 1: God in the perfection of His nature; and the Lord Jesus in the intimacy of His connection with us — God however as Father, and Jesus as Lord. We are before God, and Jesus comes with His saints. He has brought them to perfection; they are with Him, and thus before God known in the relationship of Father.

Observe also that everything refers to this hope: it was an actual and present expectation. If they were converted, it was to serve God and to

wait for His Son from heaven. Everything related to that wondrous moment when He should come. That which holiness was would be demonstrated when they should be before God, and the saints would be with their Head; moreover manifested with Him in glory, even as then they should also fully enjoy the fruit of their labor, and the reward of love in the joy of all those whom they had loved.\*

[\* It is very striking how holiness here, and manifestation in glory, are brought together as one thing in scripture, only the veil drawn aside when the glory is there. Even Christ was declared Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection. We beholding the glory with unveiled face are changed into the same image from glory to glory. So here; we are to walk in love, to be unblamable in holiness. We should have said here; but no, the veil is drawn at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. In Ephesians 5 He washes us with the word, to present us a glorious body without spot to Himself.]

The scene which would be the consummation of the work is presented here in all its moral bearing. We are before God, in His presence, where holiness is demonstrated in its true character; we are there for perfect communion with God in the light, where the connection of holiness with His nature and with the manifestation of Himself is apparent; even as this manifestation is in connection with the development of a nature in us, which by grace sets us in relationship with Him.

“Unblameable,” he says, “in holiness,” and in holiness “before God.” He is light. What immense joy, what power, through grace, in this thought, for the time present, to keep ourselves manifested before Him! But only love, known in Him, can do this.

But also we add “Our Father.” It is a known and real relationship, which has its own peculiar character, a relationship of love. It is not a thing to be acquired, and holiness is not the means of acquiring it. Holiness is the character of our relationship with God, inasmuch as we have received His nature as His children, and it is the revelation of the perfection of that nature in Him in love. Love itself has given us that nature, and has placed us in that relationship; practical holiness is its exercise in communion with God, having fellowship with Him in His presence according to the love which we thus know, that is, God Himself as He has revealed Himself towards us.

But the heart is not alone: there is companionship in this joy and in this perfection; and above all it is with Jesus Himself. He will come, He will be present, and not only He who is the Head, but all the saints with Him will be there also. It will be the accomplishment of the ways of God respecting those whom He had given to Jesus. We shall see Him in His glory, the glory which He has taken in connection with His coming for us. We shall see all the saints in whom He will be admired, and see them in the perfection which our hearts desire for them now.

Observe also that love makes us rise above the difficulties, the persecutions, the fears, which the enemy seeks to produce. Occupied with God, happy in Him, this weight of affliction is not felt. The strength of God is in the heart; the walk is sensibly connected with the eternal happiness possessed with Him, and the affliction is felt to be but light and for a moment. Nor this only; we suffer for Christ's sake: it is joy with Him, it is intimacy of communion, if we know how to appreciate it, and all is invested with the glory and salvation that are found at the end — "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

In reading this passage one cannot but observe the immediate and living way in which the Lord's coming is linked with daily practical life, so that the perfect light of that day is thrown upon the hourly path of the present time. By the exercise of love they were to be established in holiness before God at the coming of Christ. From one day to another, that day was looked for as the consummation and the only term they contemplated to the ordinary life of each day here below. How this brought the soul into the presence of God! Moreover, as I have already in part observed, they lived in a known relationship with God which gave room for this confidence. He was their Father; He is ours. The relationship of the saints to Jesus was equally known. The saints were "his saints." They were all to come with Him. They were associated with His glory. There is nothing equivocal in the expression. Jesus, the Lord, coming with all His saints, allows us to think of no other event than His return in glory. Then also will He be glorified in His saints, who will already have rejoined Him to be for ever with Him. It will be the day of their manifestation as of His.

The apostle then turns to the dangers that beset the Thessalonians in consequence of their former habits (and which were still those of the

persons that surrounded them), habits in direct contradiction to the holy and heavenly joy of which he spoke. He had already shown them how they were to walk and to please God. In this way he had himself walked among them (chap. 2:10). He would exhort them to a similar conduct with all the weight that his own walk gave him, even as he would desire their growth in love according to the affection he had for them (compare Acts 26:29). It is this which gives authority to the exhortation, and to all the words of a servant of the Lord.

The apostle takes up especially the subject of purity, for the pagan morals were so corrupt that impurity was not even accounted to be sin. It appears strange to us that such an exhortation should have been needful to such lively Christians as the Thessalonians; but we do not make allowance enough for the power of those habits in which persons have been brought up, and which become as it were a part of our nature and of the current of our thoughts, and for the action of two distinct natures under the influence of these, though the allowance or cultivation of one soon deadens the other. But the motives given here show upon what entirely new ground, as regards the commonest morality, Christianity places us. The body was but as a vessel to be used at will for whatever service they chose. They were to possess this vessel, instead of allowing themselves to be carried away by the desires of the flesh; because they knew God. They were not to deceive their brethren in these things,\* for the Lord would take vengeance. God has called us to holiness: it is with Him that we have to do; and if any one despised his brother, taking advantage of his feebleness of mind to encroach upon his rights in this respect, it would be to despise not man but God, who would Himself remember it, and who has given us His Spirit; and to act thus would be to despise that Spirit, both in one's self and in one's brother in whom He also dwells. He who was wronged in this way was not only the husband of a wife, he was the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost and ought to be respected as such. On what high ground Christianity places a man, and that in connection with our best affections!

[\* "in the matter," v. 6, in the Greek, is a euphemism for "these things."

As touching brotherly love — that new mainspring of their life — it was not necessary to exhort them: God Himself had taught them, and they were an example of love to all. Only let them abound in it even more and



more; walking quietly, working with their own hands, so as to be in no man's debt, that in this respect also the Lord might be glorified.

Such were the apostle's exhortations. That which follows is an absolutely new revelation for their encouragement and consolation.

We have seen that the Thessalonians were always expecting the Lord. It was their near and immediate hope in connection with their daily life. They were constantly expecting Him to take them to Himself. They had been converted to wait for the Son of God from heaven. Now (from want of instruction) it appeared to them that the saints who had recently died would not be with them to be caught up. The apostle clears up this point, and distinguishes between the coming of Christ to take up His own, and His day, which was a day of judgment to the world. They were not to be troubled with regard to those who had died in Christ\* as those who had no hope were troubled. And the reason which he gives for this is a proof of the strict connection of their entire spiritual life with the expectation of Christ's personal return to bring them into heavenly glory. The apostle, in comforting them with regard to their brethren who had lately died, does not say a word of the survivors rejoining them in heaven. They are maintained in the thought that they were still to look for the Lord during their lifetime to transform them into His glorious image (compare 2 Corinthians 5 and 1 Corinthians 15). An especial revelation was required to make them understand that those who had previously died would equally have their part in that event. Their part, so to speak, would resemble that of Christ. He has died, and He has risen again. And so will it be with them. And when He should return in glory, God would bring them — even as He would bring the others, that is, the living — with Him.

[\* It has been thought that the apostle speaks here of those who had died for His name's sake as martyrs. It may have been so in consequence of the persecutions, but "through Jesus" would be a singular way of expressing it; *dia* (through) with a genitive is used for a state of things, a condition that we are in, that characterises us. Being in Christ, their removal was but falling asleep, not dying. They had this position by means of Jesus, not for His name's sake. (Compare, however, 2 Corinthians 4:14).]

Upon this the apostle gives some more detailed explanation of the Lord's coming in the form of express revelation, showing how they would be with Him so as to come with Him when He appears. The living will not take precedence of those who sleep in Jesus. The Lord Himself will come as the

Head of His heavenly army, dispersed for a time, to gather them to Himself. He gives the word. The voice of the archangel passes it on, and the trumpet of God is sounded. The dead in Christ will rise first, that is to say, before the living go up; Then we who shall be alive and remain shall go with them, all together, in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. So shall we be for ever with the Lord.

It was thus that the Lord Himself ascended; for in all things we are to be like Him an important circumstance here. Whether transformed or raised from the dead, we shall all go up in the clouds. It was in the clouds that He ascended, and thus we shall be ever with Him.

In this part of the passage, where he explains the details of our ascension to the Lord in the air, nothing is said of His coming down to the earth; it is our going up (as He went up) to be with Him.\* Neither, as far as concerns us, does the apostle go farther than our gathering together to be for ever with Him. Nothing is said either of judgment or of manifestation; but only the fact of our heavenly association with Him in that we leave the earth precisely as He left it. This is very precious. There is this difference: He went up in His own full right, He ascended; as to us, His voice calls the dead, and they come forth from the grave, and, the living being changed, all are caught up together. It is a solemn act of God's power, which seals the Christians' life and the work of God, and brings the former into the glory of Christ as His heavenly companions. Glorious privilege! Precious grace! To lose sight of it destroys the proper character of our joy and of our hope.

[\* In order that we may all return — be brought back with Him — together.]

Other consequences follow, which are the result of His manifestation; but that is our portion, our hope. We leave the earth as He did, we shall for ever be with Him.

It is with these words that we are to comfort ourselves if believers die — fall asleep in Jesus. They shall return with Him when He shall be manifested; but, as regards their own portion, they will go away as He went, whether raised from the dead or transformed, to be for ever with the Lord.

All the rest refers to His government of the earth: an important subject, a part of His glory; and we also take part in it. But it is not our own peculiar portion. This is, to be with Him, to be like Him, and even (when the time shall come) to quit in the same manner as Himself the world which rejected Him, and which has rejected us, and which is to be judged.

I repeat it: to lose sight of this is to lose our essential portion. All lies in the words, “so shall we ever be with the Lord.” The apostle has here explained how this will take place.\* Remark here, that verses 15-18 are a parenthesis, and that chapter 5:1 follows on chapter 4:14; chapter 5 showing what He will do when He brings the saints with Him according to chapter 4:14.

- [\* Compare 2 Corinthians 5:1, etc. We have already remarked as a fact that this passage is a new distinct revelation. But the bearing of this fact appears here and proves that it has much importance. The Christian’s life is so connected with the day (that is to say, with the power of the life of light of which Christ lives), and Christ who is already in glory is so truly the believer’s life, that he has no other thought than to pass into it by this power of Christ’s, which will transform him (see 2 Corinthians 5:4). It required a new and accessory revelation to explain that which was wanting to the intelligence of the Thessalonians, how the dead saints should not lose their part in it. The same power would be applied to their dead bodies as to the mortal bodies of the living saints, and all would be caught up together. But the victory over death was already gained, and Christ, according to the power of resurrection, being already the believer’s life, it was but natural, according to that power, that he should pass without dying into the fullness of life with Christ. This was so much the natural thought of faith that it required an express, and as I have said, an accessory revelation to explain how the dead should have their part in it. To us now it presents no difficulty. It is the other side of this truth which we lack, which belongs to a much more lively faith, and which realizes much more the power of the life of Christ and His victory over death. No doubt the Thessalonians should have considered that Christ had died and risen again, and not have allowed the abundant power of their joy in realising their own portion in Christ to hide from them the certainty of the portion of those who slept in Him. But we see (and God allowed it that we might see) how the life which they possessed was connected with the position of the Head triumphant over death. The apostle does not weaken this faith and hope, but he adds (that they may be comforted by the thought) that the triumph of Christ would have the same power over the sleeping as over the living saints; and that God would bring back the former as well as the latter with Jesus in glory, having caught them up together as their common portion to be for ever with Him. To us also God gives this truth, this revelation of His power. He has permitted thousands to fall asleep, because (blessed be His name!) He had other thousands to call in; but the life of Christ has not lost its power, nor the truth its certainty. We as living ones wait for Him because He is our life.

We shall see Him in resurrection, if haply we die before He comes to seek us; and the time draws near. Observe, also, that this revelation gives another direction to the hope of the Thessalonians, because it distinguishes with much precision between our departure hence to join the Lord in the air, and our return to the earth with Him. Nor this only; but it shows the first to be the principal thing for Christians, while at the same time confirming and elucidating the other point. I question whether the Thessalonians would not better have understood this return with Christ than our departure hence all together to rejoin Him. Even at their conversion they had been brought to wait for Jesus from heaven. From the first the great and essential principle was established in their hearts — the Person of Christ was the object of their hearts' expectation, and they were separated thereby from the world. Perhaps they had some vague idea that they were to appear with Him in glory, but how it was to be accomplished they knew not. They were to be ready at any moment for His coming, and He and they were to be glorified together before the universe. This they knew. It is a summary of the truth. Now the apostle develops more than one point here in connection with this general truth. 1st, they would be with Christ at His coming. This, I think, is but a happy application of a truth which they already possessed, giving a little more precision to one of its precious details. At the end of chapter 3 we have the truth plainly stated (although it was still indistinct in their hearts, since they thought the dead in Christ would be deprived of it) that all the saints should come with Jesus — an essential point as to the character of our relationship to Him. So that Jesus was expected — the saints should be together with Jesus at the time of His coming — all the saints should come with Him. This fixed and gave precision to their ideas on a point already more or less known. 2nd, That which follows is a new revelation on the occasion of their mistake with regard to those who slept. They thought indeed that the Christians who were ready should be glorified with Christ when He came back to this world; but the dead — were they ready? They were not present to share the glorious manifestation of Christ on the earth. For, I doubt not, the vague idea that possessed the mind of the Thessalonians was this: Jesus would return to this world, and they who were waiting for Him would share His glorious manifestation on the earth. Now the apostle declares that the dead saints were in the same position as Jesus who had died. God had not left Him in the grave; nor would He those who had, like Him, been there. God would also bring them with Him when He should return in glory to this earth. But this was not all. The coming of Christ in glory to the earth was not the principal thing. The dead in Christ should be raised, and then, with the living, should go to meet the Lord in the air, before His manifestation, and return with Him to the earth in glory; and thus should they be ever with the Lord. This was the principal thing, the Christian's portion; namely, to dwell eternally with Christ and in heaven. The portion of the faithful was on high — was Christ Himself, although they would appear with Him in the glory. For this world it would then be the judgment.]

In this important passage then we find the Christian living in an expectation of the Lord, which is connected with his daily life and which completes it. Death then is only an accessory which may take place, and

which does not deprive the Christian of his portion when his Master shall return. The proper expectation of the Christian is entirely separated from all which follows the manifestation of Christ, and which is in connection with the government of this world.

The Lord comes in Person to receive us to Himself; He does not send. With full authority over death, which He has conquered, and with the trump of God, He calls together His own from the grave; and these, with the living (transformed), go to meet Him in the air. Our departure from the world exactly resembles His own: we leave the world, to which we do not belong, to go to heaven. Once there, we have attained our portion. We are like Christ, we are for ever with Him, but He will bring His own with Him, when He shall appear. This then was the true comfort in the case of a Christian's death, and by no means put aside the daily expectation of the Lord from heaven. On the contrary this way of viewing the subject confirmed it. The dead saint did not lose his rights by dying — by sleeping in Jesus; he should be the first object of his Lord's attention when He came to assemble His own. Nevertheless the place from which they go forth to meet Him is the earth. The dead should be raised — this was the first thing — that they might be ready to go with the others; and then from this earth all would depart together to be with Christ in heaven. This point of view is all-important, in order to apprehend the true character of that moment when all our hopes will be consummated.

The Lord's coming again into this world assumes therefore a very different character from that of a vague object of hope to a believer as a period of glory. In chapter 5 the apostle speaks of it, but in order to distinguish between the position of Christians and that of the careless and unbelieving inhabitants of the earth. The Christian, alive and taught of the Lord, ever expects the Master. There are times and seasons; it is not needful to speak to him concerning them. But (and he knows it) the day of the Lord will come, and like a thief in the night, but not for him: he is of the day; he has part in the glory which will appear in order to execute judgment on the unbelieving world. Believers are the children of light; and this light, which is the judgment of unbelievers, is the expression of the glory of God — a glory which cannot endure evil, and which, when it shall appear, will banish it from the earth. The Christian is of the day that will judge and destroy the wicked and wickedness itself from off the face of the earth.

Christ is the Sun of righteousness, and the faithful will shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

The world will say, "Peace and safety," and in all security will believe in the continuance of its prosperity and the success of its designs, and the day will come suddenly upon them (compare 2 Peter 3:3). The Lord Himself has often declared it (Matthew 24:36-44; Mark 13:33-36; Luke 12:40, etc; 17:26, etc.; 21:35, etc.).

It is a very solemn thing to see that the professing church (Revelation 3:3) which says that it lives and is in the truth, which has not Thyatira's character of corruption, is yet to be treated as the world — at least, unless it repents.

We may perhaps wonder to find the Lord saying of a time like this, that men's hearts will be failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming on the earth (Luke 21:26). But we see the two principles — both security and fear — already existing. Progress, success, the long continuance of a new development of human nature — this is the language of those who mock at the Lord's coming; and yet beneath it all, what fears for the future are at the same time possessing and weighing down the heart! I use the word "principles," because I do not believe that the moment of which the Lord speaks is yet come. But the shadow of coming events falls upon the heart. Blessed are they that belong to another world!

The apostle applies this difference of position — namely, that we belong to the day, and that it cannot therefore come upon us as a thief — to the character and walk of the Christian. Being a child of the light he is to walk as such. He lives in the day, though all is night and darkness around him. One does not sleep in the day. They that sleep sleep in the night: they that are drunken are drunken in the night; these are the works of darkness. A Christian, the child of the day, must watch and be sober, clothing himself with all that constitutes the perfection of that mode of being which belongs to his position — namely, with faith and love and hope — principles which impart courage and give him confidence for pressing onwards. He has the breastplate of faith and love: he goes straight forward therefore against the enemy. He has the hope of this glorious salvation, which will bring him entire deliverance, as his helmet; so that he can lift up his head without fear in the midst of danger. We see that the apostle here brings to

mind the three great principles of 1 Corinthians 13 to characterise the courage and steadfastness of the Christian, as at the beginning he showed that they were the mainspring of daily walk.

Faith and love naturally connect us with God, revealed as He is in Jesus as the principle of communion; so that we walk with confidence in Him: His presence gives us strength. By faith He is the glorious object before our eyes. By love He dwells in us, and we realise what He is. Hope fixes our eyes especially on Christ, who is coming to bring us into the enjoyment of glory with Himself.

Consequently the apostle speaks thus: “For God hath not appointed us to wrath” (love is understood by faith, that which God wills — His mind respecting us), “but to obtain salvation.” It is this which we hope for; and he speaks of salvation as the final deliverance “by our Lord Jesus Christ”: and he naturally adds, “who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep” (have died before His coming or be then alive), “we should live together with Him.” Death does not deprive us of this deliverance and glory; for Jesus died. Death became the means of obtaining them for us; and if we die, we shall equally live with Him. He died for us, in our stead, in order that, happen what may, we should live with Him. Everything that hindered it is put out of our way and has lost its power; and, more than lost its power, has become a guarantee of our unhindered enjoyment of the full life of Christ in glory; so that we may comfort ourselves — and more than that, we may build ourselves up — with these glorious truths, through which God meets all our wants and all our necessities. This (v. 10) is the end of the special revelation with regard to those who sleep before the coming of the Lord Jesus, beginning with chapter 4:13.

I would here call the reader’s attention to the way in which the apostle speaks of the Lord’s coming in the different chapters of this epistle. It will be noticed that the Spirit does not present the church here as a body. Life is the subject — that of each Christian therefore individually: a very important point assuredly.

In **CHAPTER 1** the expectation of the Lord is presented in a general way as characterising the Christian. They are converted to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven. Here it is the object itself that is presented, the Person of the Lord. God’s own Son shall come, and shall

satisfy all the heart's desire. This is neither His kingdom, nor the judgment, nor even rest; it is the Son of God; and this Son of God is Jesus, risen from among the dead, and who has delivered us from the wrath to come; for wrath is coming Each believer therefore expects for himself the Son of God — expects Him from heaven.

In **CHAPTER 2** it is association with the saints, joy in the saints at the coming of Christ.

In **CHAPTER 3** responsibility is more the subject — responsibility in liberty and in joy; but still a position before God in connection with the Christian's walk and life here below. The Lord's appearing is the measure and test time of holiness. The testimony rendered by God to this life, by giving it its natural place, takes place when Christ is manifested with all His saints. It is not here His coming for us, but His coming with us. This distinction between the two events always exists. For Christians even and for the church, that which refers to responsibility is always found in connection with the appearing of the Lord; our joy, with His coming to take us to Himself.

Thus far then, we have the general expectation of the Lord in Person, His Son from heaven; love satisfied at His coming as regards others; holiness in its full value and full development. In chapter 4 it is not the connection of life with its full development in our being actually with Christ, but victory over death (which is no barrier to this); and, at the same time, the strengthening and establishment of hope in our common departure hence, similarly to that of Jesus, to be for ever with Him.

The exhortations that conclude the epistle are brief; the mighty action of the life of God in these dear disciples made them comparatively little needed. Exhortation is always good. There was nothing among them to blame. Happy condition! They were perhaps not sufficiently instructed for a large development of doctrine (the apostle hoped to see them for that purpose); but there was enough of life, a personal relationship with God sufficiently true and real, to build them up on that ground. To him that hath shall more be given. The apostle could rejoice with them and confirm their hope and add to it some details as a revelation from God. The assembly in all ages is profited by it.



In the epistle to the Philippians we see life in the Spirit rising above all circumstances, as the fruit of long experience of the goodness and faithfulness of God; and thus showing its remarkable power when the help of the saints had failed, and the apostle was in distress, his life in danger, after four years' imprisonment, by a merciless tyrant. It is then that he decides his case by the interests of the assembly. It is then that he can proclaim, that we ought always to rejoice in the Lord, and that Christ is all things to him, to live is Christ, death a gain to him. It is then that he can do all things through Him, who strengthens him. This he has learnt. In Thessalonians we have the freshness of the fountain near to its source; the energy of the first spring of life in the believer's soul, presenting all the beauty and purity and vigor of its first verdure under the influence of the sun that had risen upon them and made the sap of life rise, the first manifestations of which had not been deteriorated by contact with the world or by an enfeebled view of invisible things.

The apostle desired that the disciples should acknowledge those who labored among them and guided them in grace and admonished them, and esteem them greatly for their work's sake. The operation of God always attracts a soul that is moved by the Holy Ghost, and commands its attention and its respect: on this foundation the apostle builds his exhortation. It is not office which is in question here (if such existed), but the work which attracted and attached the heart. They ought to be known: spirituality acknowledged this operation of God. Love, devotedness, the answer to the need of souls, patience in dealing with them on the part of God — all this commended itself to the believer's heart: and it blessed God for the care He bestowed upon His children. God acted in the laborer and in the hearts of the faithful. Blessed be God, it is an ever-existing principle, and one that never grows weaker!

The same Spirit produced peace among themselves. This grace was of great value. If love appreciated the work of God in the laborer, it would esteem the brother as in the presence of God: self-will would not act.

Now this renunciation of self-will, and this practical sense of the operation and presence of God, gives power to warn the unruly, to comfort the fearful, to help the weak, and to be patient towards all. The apostle exhorts them to it. Communion with God is the power and His word the

guide in so doing. In no case were they to render evil for evil, but to follow that which was good among themselves and towards all. All this conduct depends on communion with God, on His presence with us, which makes us superior to evil. He is this in love; and we can be so by walking with Him.

Such were the apostle's exhortations to guide their walk with others. As regards their personal state, joy, prayer, thanksgiving in all things, these should be their characteristics. With respect to the public actings of the Spirit in their midst, the apostle's exhortations to these simple and happy Christians were equally brief. They were not to hinder the action of the Spirit in their midst (for this is the meaning of quenching the Spirit); nor to despise that which He might say to them, even by the mouth of the most simple, if He were pleased to use it. Being spiritual, they could judge all things. They were therefore not to receive everything that presented itself, even in the name of the Spirit, but to prove all things. They were to hold fast that which was good; those who by faith have received the truth of the word do not waver. One is not ever learning the truth of that which one has learnt from God. As to evil, they were to abstain from it in all its forms. Such were the apostle's brief exhortations to these Christians who indeed rejoiced his heart. And in truth it is a fine picture of christian walk, which we find here so livingly portrayed in the apostle's communications.

He concludes his epistle by commending them to the God of peace, that they might be preserved blameless until the coming of the Lord Jesus.

After an epistle like this his heart turned readily to the God of peace; for we enjoy peace in the presence of God — not only peace of conscience but peace of heart.

In the previous part we found the activity of love in the heart; that is to say, God present and acting in us, who are viewed as partaking, at the same time, of the divine nature, which is the spring of that holiness which will be manifested in all its perfection before God at the coming of Jesus with all His saints. Here it is the God of peace, to whom the apostle looks for the accomplishment of this work. There it was the activity of a divine principle in us a principle connected with the presence of God and our communion with Him. Here it is the perfect rest of heart in which holiness develops itself. The absence of peace in the heart arises from the activity

of the passions and the will, increased by the sense of powerlessness to satisfy or even to gratify them.

But in God all is peace. He can be active in love; He can glorify Himself by creating what He will; He can act in judgment to cast out the evil that is before His eyes. But He rests ever in Himself, and both in good and in evil He knows the end from the beginning and is undisturbed. When He fills the heart, He imparts this rest to us: we cannot rest in ourselves; we cannot find rest of heart in the actings of our passions, either without an object or upon an object, nor in the rending and destructive energy of our own will. We find our rest in God — not the rest that implies weariness, but rest of heart in the possession of all that we desire, and of that which even forms our desires and fully satisfies them, in the possession of an object in which conscience has nothing to reproach us and has but to be silent, in the certainty that it is the Supreme Good which the heart is enjoying, the supreme and only authority to whose will it responds — and that will is love towards us. God bestows rest, peace. He is never called the God of joy. He gives us joy truly, and we ought to rejoice; but joy implies something surprising, unexpected, exceptional, at least in contrast with, and in consequence of, evil. The peace that we possess, that which satisfies us, has no element of this kind, nothing which is in contrast, nothing which disturbs. It is more deep, more perfect, than joy. It is more the satisfaction of a nature in that which perfectly answers to it, and in which it develops itself, without any contrast being necessary to enhance the satisfaction of a heart that has not all which it desires, or of which it is capable.

God, as we have said, rests thus in Himself — is this rest for Himself. He gives us, and is for us, this entire peace. The conscience being perfect through the work of Christ who has made peace and reconciled us to God, the new nature — and consequently the heart — finds its perfect satisfaction in God, and the will is silent; moreover, it has nothing further to desire.

It is not only that God meets the desires that we have: He is the source of new desires to the new man by the revelation of Himself in love.\* He is both the source of the nature and its infinite object; and that, in love. It is His part to be so. It is more than creation; it is reconciliation, which is

more than creation, because there is in it more development of love, that is to say, of God: and it is thus that we know God. It is that which He is essentially in Christ.

[\* Hence there is the opposite to weariness in the heavenly enjoyment of God; because He who is the infinite object of enjoyment is the infinite source and strength of capacity to enjoy, though we enjoy as recipient creatures.]

In the angels He glorifies Himself in creation: they excel us in strength. In Christians He glorifies Himself in reconciliation, to make them the first-fruits of His new creation, when He shall have reconciled all things in heaven and on earth by Christ. Therefore it is written “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children sons] of God.” They have His nature and His character.

It is in these relationships with God — or rather it is God in these relationships with us in peace, in His communion, who develops sanctification, our inward conformity of affection and intelligence (and consequently of outward conduct) with Him and His will. “The God of peace himself sanctify you wholly.” May there be nothing in us that does not yield to this benignant influence of peace which we enjoy in communion with God! May no power or force in us own anything but Himself! In all things may He be our all, so that He only may rule in our hearts!

He has brought us perfectly into this place of blessedness in Christ and by His work. There is nothing between us and God but the exercise of His love, the enjoyment of our happiness, and the worship of our hearts. We are the proof before Him, the testimony, the fruit, of the accomplishment of all that He holds most precious, of that which has perfectly glorified Him, of that in which He delights, and of the glory of the One who has accomplished it, namely, of Christ, and of His work. We are the fruit of the redemption that Christ has accomplished, and the objects of the satisfaction which God must feel in the exercise of His love.

God in grace is the God of peace for us; for here divine righteousness finds its satisfaction, and love its perfect exercise.

The apostle now prays that, in this character, God may work in us to make everything respond to Himself thus revealed. Here only is this

development of humanity given — "body, soul, and spirit." The object is assuredly not metaphysical, but to express man in all the parts of his being; the vessel by which he expresses that which he is, the natural affections of his soul, the elevated workings of his mind, through which he is above the animals and in intelligent relationship with God. May God be found in each, as the mover, spring, and guide!

In general the words "soul and spirit" are used without making any distinction between them for the soul of man was formed very differently from that of animals in that God breathed into his nostrils the breath (spirit) of life, and it was thus that man became a living soul. Therefore it suffices to say soul as to man, and the other is supposed. Or, in saying spirit, in this sense the elevated character of his soul is expressed. The animal has also its natural affections, has a living soul, attaches itself, knows the persons who do it good, devotes itself to its master, loves him, will even give its life for him; but it has not that which can be in relationship with God (alas! which can set itself at enmity against Him), which can occupy itself with things outside its own nature as the master of others.

The Spirit then wills that man, reconciled with God, should be consecrated, in every part of his being, to the God who has brought him into relationship with Himself by the revelation of His love, and by the work of His grace, and that nothing in the man should admit an object beneath the divine nature of which he is partaker; so that he should thus be preserved blameless unto the coming of Christ.

Let us observe here, that it is in no wise beneath the new nature in us to perform our duties faithfully in all the various relationships in which God has placed us; but quite the contrary. That which is required is to bring God into them, His authority, and the intelligence which that imparts. Therefore it is said to husbands to live with their wives "according to knowledge," or intelligence; that is to say, not only with human and natural affections (which, as things are, do not by themselves even maintain their place), but as before God and conscious of His will. It may be that God may call us, in connection with the extraordinary work of His grace, to consecrate ourselves entirely to it; but otherwise the will of God is accomplished in the relationships in which He has placed us, and divine

intelligence and obedience to God are developed in them. Finally God has called us to this life of holiness with Himself; He is faithful and He will accomplish it. May He enable us to cleave to Him, that we may realise it!

Observe again here, how the coming of Christ is introduced, and the expectation of this coming, as an integral part of christian life. "Blameless," it says, "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The life which had developed itself in obedience and holiness meets the Lord at His coming. Death is not in question. The life which we have found is to be such when He appears. The man, in every part of his being, moved by this life, is found there blameless when Jesus comes. Death was overcome (not yet destroyed): a new life is ours. This life, and the man living of this life, are found, with their Head and Source, in the glory. Then will the weakness disappear which is connected with his present condition. That which is mortal shall be swallowed up of life: that is all. We are Christ's: He is our life. We wait for Him, that we may be with Him, and that He may perfect all things in the glory.

Let us also here examine a little into that which this passage teaches us with regard to sanctification. It is connected indeed with a nature, but it is linked with an object; and it depends for its realisation on the operation of another, namely, of God Himself; and it is founded on a perfect work of reconciliation with God, already accomplished. Inasmuch as it is founded on an accomplished reconciliation, into which we enter by the reception of a new nature, the scriptures consider Christians as already perfectly sanctified in Christ. It is practically carried out by the operation of the Holy Ghost, who, in imparting this nature, separates us — as thus born again — entirely from the world. It is important to maintain this truth, and to stand very clearly and distinctly on this ground: otherwise practical sanctification soon becomes detached from a new nature received, and is but the amelioration of the natural man and then it is quite legal, a return — after reconciliation — into doubt and uncertainty, because, though justified, the man is not accounted meet for heaven — this depends on progress so that justification does not give peace with God. Scripture says, "Giving thanks to the Father, who hath made us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." Progress there is, but it is not in scripture connected with meetness. The thief was meet for Paradise and went there. Such

views are an enfeebling, not to say destructive, of the work of redemption, that is, of its appreciation in our hearts by faith.

We are then sanctified (it is thus the scripture most frequently speaks) by God the Father, by the blood and the offering of Christ, and by the Spirit — that is to say, we are set apart for God personally and for ever. In this point of view justification is presented in the word as consequent upon sanctification, a thing into which we enter through it. Taken up as sinners in the world, we are set apart by the Holy Ghost to enjoy all the efficacy of the work of Christ according to the counsels of the Father: set apart by the communication of a new life, no doubt, but placed by this setting apart in the enjoyment of all that Christ has gained for us. I say again, It is very important to hold fast this truth both for the glory of God and for our own peace: but the Spirit of God in this epistle does not speak of it in this point of view, but of the practical realisation of the development of this life of separation from the world and from evil. He speaks of this divine development in the inner man, which makes sanctification a real and intelligent condition of soul, a state of practical communion with God, according to that nature and to the revelation of God with which it is connected.

In this respect we find indeed a principle of life which works in us — that which is called a subjective state: but it is impossible to separate this operation in us from an object (man would be God if it were so), nor consequently from a continual work of God in us that holds us in communion with that object, which is God Himself. Accordingly it is through the truth by the word, whether at first in the communication of life, or in detail all along our path. “Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.”

Man, we know, has degraded himself. He has enslaved himself to the lusts of the animal part of his being. But how? By departing from God. God does not sanctify man apart from the knowledge of Himself, leaving man still at a distance from Him; but, while giving him a new nature which is capable of it, by giving to this nature (which cannot even exist without it) an object — Himself, He does not make man independent, as he wished to be: the new man is the dependent man; it is his perfection — Jesus Christ exemplified this in His life. The new man is a man dependent in his

affections, who desires to be so, who delights in, and cannot be happy without being so, and whose dependence is on love, while still obedient as a dependent being ought to be.

Thus they who are sanctified possess a nature that is holy in its desires and its tastes. It is the divine nature in them, the life of Christ. But they do not cease to be men. They have God revealed in Christ for their object. Sanctification is developed in communion with God, and in affections which go back to Christ, and which wait for Him. But the new nature cannot reveal an object to itself; and still less could it have its object by setting God aside at its will. It is dependent on God for the revelation of Himself. His love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost whom He has given us; and the same Spirit takes of the things of Christ and communicates them to us. Thus we grow in the knowledge of God, being strengthened mightily by His Spirit in the inner man, that we may “comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,” and be filled unto the fullness of God. Thus, “we all with open face beholding the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.” “For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified through the truth.”

We see by these passages, which might be multiplied, that we are dependent on an object, and that we are dependent on the strength of another. Love acts in order to work in us according to this need.

Our setting apart for God, which is complete (for it is by means of a nature that is purely of Himself, and in absolute responsibility to Him, for we are no longer our own, but are bought with a price, and sanctified by the blood of Christ according to the will of God, who will have us for His own), places us in a relationship, the development of which (by an increasing knowledge of God, who is the object of our new nature) is practical sanctification, wrought in us by the power of the Holy Ghost, the witness in us of the love of God. He attaches the heart to God, ever revealing Him more and more, and at the same time unfolding the glory of Christ and all the divine qualities that were displayed in Him in human nature, thus forming ours as born of God.



Therefore it is, as we have seen in this epistle, that love, working in us, is the means of sanctification (chap. 3:12, 13). It is the activity of the new nature, of the divine nature in us; and that connected with the presence of God; for he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God. And in this chapter 5 the saints are commended to God Himself, that He may work it in them; while we are always set in view of the glorious objects of our faith in order to accomplish it.

We may here more particularly call the reader's attention to these objects. They are, God Himself, and the coming of Christ: on the one hand, communion with God; on the other, waiting for Christ. It is most evident that communion with God is the practical position of the highest sanctification. He who knows that we shall see Jesus as He now is, and be like Him, purifies himself even as He is pure. By our communion with the God of peace we are wholly sanctified. If God is practically our all, we are altogether holy. (We are not speaking of any change in the flesh, which can neither be subjected to God nor please Him). The thought of Christ and His coming preserves us practically, and in detail, and intelligently, blameless. It is God Himself who thus preserves us, and who works in us to occupy our hearts and cause us continually to grow.

But this point deserves yet a few more words. The freshness of christian life in the Thessalonians made it, as it were, more objective; so that these objects are prominent, and very distinctly recognised by the heart. We have already said that they are God the Father, and the Lord Jesus. With reference to the communion of love with the saints as his crown and glory, he speaks only of the Lord Jesus. This has a special character of reward, although a reward in which love reigns. Jesus Himself had the joy that was set before Him as sustainment in His sufferings, a joy which thus was personal to Himself. The apostle also, as regarded his work and labor, waited with Christ for its fruit. Besides this case of the apostle (chap. 2), we find God Himself and Jesus as the object before us, and the joy of communion with God — and this, in the relationship of Father — and with Christ, whose glory and position we share through grace.

Thus it is only in the two epistles to the Thessalonians that we find the expression “to the church which is in God the Father.”\* The sphere of their communion is thus shown, founded on the relationship in which they

found themselves with God Himself in the character of Father (1 Thessalonians 1:3, 9, 10; 3:13; 4:15, 16; and here v. 23). It is important to remark, that the more vigorous and living Christianity is, the more objective it is. It is but saying that God and the Lord Jesus have a greater place in our thoughts; and that we rest more really upon them. This epistle to the Thessalonians is the part of scripture which instructs on this point; and it is a means of judging many a fallacy in the heart, and of giving a great simplicity to our Christianity.

[\* Perhaps too in connection with their recent deliverance from idols to the one true God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.]

The apostle closes his epistle by asking for the prayers of the brethren, saluting them with the confidence of affection, and adjuring them to have his epistle read to all the holy brethren. His heart forgot none of them. He would be in relationship with all according to this spiritual affection and personal bond. Apostle towards all of them, he would have them recognise those who labored among them, but he maintained withal his own relationship. His was a heart which embraced all the revealed counsels of God on the one hand, and did not lose sight of the least of His saints on the other.

It remains to take notice of one interesting circumstance as to the manner in which the apostle instructs them. He takes, in the first chapter, the truths which were precious to their heart, but were still somewhat vaguely seized by their intelligence, and as to which they were indeed fallen into mistakes, and employs them (in the clearness in which he possessed them himself) in his practical instructions, and applies them to known and experienced relationships, that their souls might be well established on positive truth, and clear as to its use, before he touched on their error and the mistakes they had made. They waited for His Son from heaven. This they already possessed clearly in their hearts; but they would be in the presence of God when Jesus comes with all His saints. This was clearing up a very important point without directly touching the error. Their heart got straight as to the truth in its practical application to what the heart possessed. They understood what it was to be before God the Father. It was much more intimate and real than a manifestation of terrestrial and finite glory. Further they would be before God when Jesus came with an His saints; a simple truth which demonstrated itself to the heart by the

simple fact that Jesus could not have come only of His assembly. The heart seized this truth without an effort; yet in doing so it was established, as was the understanding also, in what made the whole truth clear, and that in view of the relationship of the Thessalonians to Christ and those that were His. The joy even of the apostle in meeting them all (those who had died consequently, as well as the living) at the coming of Jesus, placed the soul on an entirely different ground from that of being found here, and blessed by the arrival of Jesus when they were here below.

Thus enlightened, confirmed, established, in the real bearing of the truth which they possessed already, by a development of it which connected itself with their best affections and with their most intimate spiritual knowledge, founded on their communion with God, they were ready with certain fixed basis of truth to enter on and set aside without difficulty an error which was not in accord with what they now knew how to appreciate at its just value, as forming part of their moral possessions. Special revelation made all clear as to details. This manner of proceeding is very instructive.

## 2 THESSALONIANS

In the second epistle to the Thessalonians, the apostle corrects some errors into which these disciples had fallen with regard to the day of the Lord through certain false teachers; as in part of the first epistle he had enlightened the ignorance of the believers themselves respecting the portion of the saints at the coming of Christ to take them to Himself — a point on which they were evidently but little instructed.

A measure of Jewish darkness was on their minds; and they were, in some points, still subjected to the influence of that unhappy nation, which was ever struggling to maintain a position lost through its unbelief.

This Jewish influence enables us to understand why the apostle spoke as he did in chapter 2:15, 16, of the first epistle. At that time this influence showed itself in the tendency of the Thessalonians to lose sight of the heavenly side of the Lord's coming, to think that He would return to the earth and that they should then be glorified with Him — as a Jew might have believed — and that the dead saints would therefore not be present to share this glory. I do not say that this thought had assumed a definite form in the minds of the Thessalonians. To them the principal and living object was the Lord Himself, and they were awaiting His return with hearts full of joy and life; but the heavenly side of this expectation had not its place clearly marked in their minds, and they connected the coming too much with the manifestation, so that the earthly character predominated, and the dead seemed to be shut out from it.

When the second epistle was written, this Jewish influence had another character; and the false teachers were more directly concerned in it.

The faithful at Thessalonica had learnt to contemplate “the day of the Lord” as a day of judgment. The Old Testament had spoken much of this day of the Lord, a day of darkness and unparalleled judgment, a day of trial to men (compare Isaiah 13, Joel 2, Amos 5:18). Now the Thessalonians were undergoing dreadful persecution. Perhaps their hope of an earthly intervention of the Lord, during their lifetime, was weakened. The apostle at least rejoiced at the increase of their faith, and the abundant exercise of

their love, while he is silent with regard to their hope; and the joy of christian life is not found here as it was manifested in the first epistle. Nevertheless they were walking well, and the apostle gloried in them\* in the churches of God. But the false teachers profited by their condition to mislead them by means of their sufferings, which weighed more heavily on their hearts from the joy of hope being a little weakened; and at the same time the remains of the influence of Judaizing thoughts, or of habits of mind formed through them, furnished occasion to the assaults of the enemy. The instrument of the subtle malice told them that the day of the Lord, that fearful time, was already come — the word (chap. 2:2) is not “at hand,” but “come,” “present”\*\* and all that the Thessalonians were suffering, and by which their hearts were shaken, appeared like a testimony to prove it and to confirm the words of the false teachers. Was it not written that it should be a day of trial and anguish?

[\* In the first epistle he says he needed not to speak of them, seeing that the world itself recounted everywhere the principles by which they were governed. We shall see a similar difference all through. It is no longer the same fresh energy of life.]

[\*\* See Romans 8:38; 1 Corinthians 3:22; where the Greek is translated “present,” in contrast with “things to come.”]

The words of these teachers, moreover, had the pretension of being more than human reasoning; it was a word of the Lord, it was the Spirit who spoke, it was a letter from an inspired channel: and so bold and wicked were they in regard to this matter, that they did not fear to adduce the apostle’s own name as their authority for declaring that the day was come. Now the dominion of fear, which Satan can exercise over the mind, when it is not kept of God in peace and joy, is astonishing. “In nothing terrified by your adversaries,” is the apostle’s word to the Philippians, “which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.” In such a state of mind as this everything is believed; or rather everything is feared, and nothing is believed. The heart gives itself up to this fear, and is ready to believe anything; for it is in darkness and knows not what to believe. Thus the apostle exhorts the Thessalonians (chap. 2) not to be soon shaken in mind so as to lose their stability in the truth, and not to be troubled.

The apostle deals with the case in the same manner as in the first epistle. Before entering on the error he treats the same subject in its true light, building upon the knowledge which the Thessalonians already possessed. Only he sets it forth with clearness in its application to the circumstances of the moment. By this means they were delivered from the influence of the error, and from the disturbance of mind which it had caused; and were rendered capable of looking at the error, as being themselves outside it, and of judging it according to the instruction that the apostle gave them.

They were persecuted and were in distress and suffering, and the enemy took advantage of it. The apostle puts that fact in its right place. He encourages them with the thought that it was a kind of seal upon them of their being worthy of the kingdom for which they were suffering. But more, the “day of the Lord” was the coming of the Lord in judgment; but it was not to make His own suffer that He was coming — it was to punish the wicked. Persecution therefore could not be the day of the Lord; for in persecution the wicked had the upper hand and did their own will and inflicted suffering on those whom the Lord loved. Could that be His day! The apostle does not apply this argument to the question, but he puts the facts in their place; so that all the use which the enemy made of them fell of itself to the ground. The truth of the facts was there in its simplicity, giving them their evident and natural character. When God should take the thing in hand, He would recompense tribulation to those who troubled His children, and these should have rest — should be in peace. The moment of their entering into this rest is not at all the subject here, but the contrast between their actual condition and that which it would be if Jesus were come. It was not to persecute and harass His own that He was coming. In His day they should be at rest, and the wicked in distress; for He was coming to punish the latter by driving them away for ever from the glory of His presence. When we understand that the Thessalonians had been induced to believe that the day of the Lord was already come, the import of this first chapter is very plain.

Two principles are here established. First, the righteous judgment of God: it is righteous in His eyes, on the one hand, to reward those who suffer for His kingdom’s sake: and, on the other, to requite those who persecute His children. In the second place, the glorious manifestation of the Lord Jesus:

His own should be in rest and happiness with Him, when His power should be in exercise.

We see also here two reasons for judgment — they did not know God, and they did not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. All being without excuse as to the testimony that God had ever given concerning Himself, some among them had added the rejection of the positive revelation of His grace in the gospel of Christ to their abuse of their natural relationship with God and their forgetfulness of His Majesty.

Meanwhile the apostle presents the positive result in blessing of the manifestation of Jesus in glory. He will come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that have believed in Him, and therefore in the Thessalonians: a thorough proof, at least that they were not to view their persecuted condition as a demonstration that the day was come. With regard to themselves, they were thus entirely delivered from the confusion by which the enemy sought to disquiet them; and the apostle could treat the question of this error with hearts which, as to their own condition, were set free from it and at rest.

These considerations characterised his prayers on their behalf. He sought from God that they might always be worthy of this vocation, and that the Lord might be glorified in them by the power of faith, which would shine the brighter through their persecutions; and that afterwards they might be glorified in Him at the manifestation of His glory according to the grace of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that the apostle has placed their souls on the ground of truth, he enters upon the subject of the error, showing that which had occasioned his remarks. Of this we have already spoken.

In answering this error, and in guarding them from the wily efforts of seducers, he puts everything in its place here by appealing to precious truths of which he had already spoken. Their gathering together unto Christ in the air was a demonstration of the impossibility of the day of the Lord being already come.

Moreover with regard to this last he presents two considerations: first, the day could not be already come, since Christians were not yet gathered to the Lord, and they were to come with Him; second, the wicked one who

has then to be judged had not yet appeared, so that the judgment could not be executed.

The apostle had already instructed the Thessalonians with regard to this wicked one, when at Thessalonica; and in the former epistle he had taught them concerning the rapture of the church. In order that the Lord should come in judgment, iniquity must have reached its height, and open opposition to God have been manifested. But the truth had another and a more precious side: the saints were to be in the same position as Christ, to be gathered together unto Him, before He could manifest Himself in glory to those outside. But these truths require a more connected examination.

Their gathering together unto Christ before the manifestation was a truth known to the Thessalonians; it is not revealed here, it is used as an argument. The Lord Jesus was coming, but it was impossible that He should be without His church in the glory. The King would indeed punish His rebellious subjects; but, before doing so, He would bring to Himself those who had been faithful to Him amid the unfaithful, in order to bring them back with Him and publicly to honor them in the midst of the rebels. But the apostle here speaks only of the rapture itself, and he adjures them only by that truth not to allow themselves to be shaken in mind as though the day were come. What an assured truth must this have been to Christians, since the apostle could appeal to it as to a known point, on which the heart could rest! The relationship of the church to Christ, its being necessarily in the same position with Him, rendered the idea that the day was already come a mere folly.

In the second place, the already known fact is asserted, that the apostasy must previously take place, and then the man of sin be revealed. Solemn truth! Everything takes its place. The forms and the name of Christianity have long been maintained; true Christians have been disowned; but now there should be a public renunciation of the faith — an apostasy. True Christians should have their true place in heaven. But, besides this, there should be a person who would fully realise in sin the character of man without God. He is the man of sin. He does his own will — it is but Adam fully developed; and, incited by the enemy, he opposes himself to God (it is open enmity against God) and he exalts himself above all that bears the name of God; he assumes the place of God in His temple. So that there is



apostasy, that is, the open renunciation of Christianity in general, and an individual who concentrates in his own person (as to the principles of iniquity) the opposition that is made against God.

It will be noticed that the character of the wicked one is religious here, or rather anti-religious. The apostle does not speak of a secular power of the world, whatever its iniquity may be. The man of sin assumes a religious character. He exalts himself against the true God, but he shows himself as God\* in the temple of God. Observe here that the sphere is on earth. It is not a God for faith. He shows himself as a God for the earth. The profession of Christianity has been abandoned. Sin then characterises an individual, a man, who fills up the measure of the apostasy of human nature, and, as a man, proclaims his independence of God. The principle of sin in man is his own will. He arises, as we have already seen, out of the rejection of Christianity. In this respect also evil is at its height.

[\* “as God” is to be left out before “sitteth,” in chapter 2:4.]

This man of sin exalts himself above God, and, sitting as God in the temple of God, he defies the God of Israel. This last feature gives his formal character. He is in conflict with God, as placing himself publicly in this position — shewing himself as God in the temple of God. It is the God of Israel who will take vengeance on him.

Christianity, Judaism, natural religion, all are rejected. Man takes a place there on earth, exalting himself above it all, in opposition to God; and, in particular, arrogating to himself (for man needs a God, needs something to worship) the place and the honors of God, and of the God of Israel.\*

[\* In 1 John 2 we find the double character of the Antichrist as regards Christianity and Judaism. He denies the Father and the Son, rejects Christianity; he denies that Jesus is the Christ, which is Jewish unbelief. His power is the working of Satan, as we find here. As man he sets up to be God. So that his impiousness is manifested in every way. As the question is more upon the earth, it is the God of the earth, the Man withal from heaven, who judges him.]

These verses present the wicked one in connection with the state of man, and with the different relationships in which man has stood towards God. In them all he shows himself as apostate, and then he assumes the place of God Himself the first object of human ambition, as its attainment was the first suggestion of Satan.

In that which follows, we see not the condition itself of apostasy with regard to the different positions in which God had placed man, but simply man unrestrained, and the work of Satan. The man is but the vessel of the enemy's power.

Man in whom is the fullness of the Godhead, the Lord Jesus, and man filled with the energy of Satan, are opposed to each other. Before, it was man forsaking God, wicked, and exalting himself. Here, it is opposition against God on the part of man, unrestrained, and inspired by Satan himself. Consequently we have (not the wicked one, but) the lawless — the unbridled-one. The principle is the same, for “sin is lawlessness” (see remarks 1 John 3:4). But in this first case man is viewed in his departure from God, and in his guiltiness; in the second, as acknowledging none but himself.

To this condition in which all restraint will be removed, a barrier has yet existed.

The apostle had already told them of the apostasy, and of the manifestation of the man of sin. He now says that the Thessalonians ought to know the hindrance that existed to his progress and his manifestation before the appointed time. He does not say that he had told them, but they ought to know it. Knowing the character of the wicked one, the barrier revealed itself. The main point here is that it was a barrier. The principle of the evil was already at work: a barrier alone prevented its development. Its character, when developed, would be unbridled will which exalts and opposes itself.\*

[\* Note this point. All was ready and complete in the apostle's time, only restrained. So Christ was ready to judge. Only the patience of God waits, in the accepted time.]

Unbridled self-will being the principle of the evil, that which bridles this will is the barrier. Now it exalts itself above all that bears the name of God, or to which homage is paid: that which hinders it therefore is the power of God acting in government here below as authorised by Him. The grossest abuse of power still bears this last character. Christ could say to Pilate, “Thou couldest have no power against me, except it were given thee from above.” Wicked as he might be, his power is owned as coming from God. Thus, although men had rejected and crucified the Son of God, so that their

iniquity appeared to be at its height, the hindrance still existed in full. Afterwards God, having sent His Spirit, gathers out the church, and, although the mystery of iniquity began immediately to work mingling the will of men with the worship of God in Spirit, God had always (He still has) the object of His loving care upon the earth. The Holy Ghost was here below; the assembly, be its condition what it might, was still on earth, and God maintained the barrier. And as the porter had opened the door to Jesus in spite of all obstacles, so He sustains everything, however great the energy and progress of evil, The evil is bridled: God is the source of authority on earth. There is one who hinders until he be taken out of the way. Now when the assembly (the assembly, that is, as composed of the true members of Christ) is gone, and consequently the Holy Ghost as the Comforter is no longer dwelling here below, then the apostasy takes place,\* the time to remove the hindrance is come, the evil is unbridled, and at length (without saying how much time it will take) the evil assumes a definite shape in him who is its head. The beast comes up from the abyss. Satan — not God — gives him his authority; and in the second beast all the energy of Satan is present. The man of sin is there.

[\* The principle of this may be widely at work individually, as in 1 John 2 it had begun, but the open public manifestation was to come. Jude gives the creeping in to produce corruption; John, the going out which characterises the Antichrist.]

Here it is not outward and secular power that is spoken of, but the religious side of Satan's energy.

With regard to the individual instruments who compose the barrier, they may change every moment, and it was not the object of the Holy Ghost to name them. He who was the one of them that existed when this epistle was written would not be so at the present time; to have named him then would have been of no use to us in the present day. The object was to declare that the evil which should be judged was already working, that there was no remedy for it, that it was only a hindrance on God's part which prevented its full development: a principle of the highest importance with regard to the history of Christianity.

Whatever form it might take, the apostasy of the men who would renounce grace would necessarily be more absolute than any other. It is opposition to the Lord. It has the character of an adversary. The other principle of

human iniquity enters into it, but this is the source of the “perdition.” It is the rejection of goodness; it is direct enmity.

“That which hinders” is in general only an instrument, a means, which prevents the manifestation of the man of sin — the wicked one. So long as the assembly is on earth, the pretension to be God in His temple cannot take place or at least would have no influence. Satan has his sphere, and must needs have it, in the mystery of iniquity; but there is no longer a mystery when the place of God in His temple is openly taken. That which hinders is therefore still present. But there is a person active in maintaining this hindrance. Here I think indeed that it is God in the Person of the Holy Ghost, who during the time called “the things that are,” restrains the evil and guards divine authority in the world. As long as that subsists, the unrestrained exaltation of wickedness cannot take place. Consequently I do not doubt but that the rapture of the saints is the occasion of the hindrance being removed and all restraint loosed, although some of the ways of God are developed before the full manifestation of the evil.

This thought does not rest upon great principles only: the passage itself supplies elements which show the state of things when the power of evil develops itself. 1st, The apostasy has already taken place. This could hardly be said if the testimony of the assembly still subsisted, as it had in time past, or even yet more distinctly as being freed from all false and corrupting elements. 2nd, Authority — as established of God, so far as exercising a restraint on man’s will in God’s name — has disappeared from the scene, for the wicked one exalts himself against all that is called God and to which homage is paid, and presents himself as God in the temple of God. Compare Psalm 82, where God stands among the gods (the judges) to judge them before He inherits the nations. Before that solemn hour when God will judge the judges of the earth, this wicked one, despising all authority that comes from Him, sets himself up as God: and that on the earth, where the judgment will be manifested. And then, 3rd, In place of the Holy Ghost and His power manifested on the earth, we find the power of Satan, and with precisely the same tokens that bore witness to the Person of Christ. So that the passage itself, whether as to man or as to the enemy, gives us (in the three points of which we have spoken) the full confirmation of that which we have ventured to set forth.

The assembly, the powers ordained by God upon the earth, the Holy Ghost present here as the Comforter in lieu of Christ, have all (as regards the manifestation of the government and the work of God) given place to the self-willed unbridled man, and to the power of the enemy.

In saying this we speak of the sphere of this prophecy, which moreover embraces that of the public testimony of God on earth.

Definitely then we have man here in his own nature — as it has displayed itself by forsaking God — in the full pursuit of his own will in rebellion against God; the willful man, developed as the result of apostasy from the position of grace in which the assembly stood, and in contempt of all the governmental authority of God on the earth. And since that authority had shown itself directly and properly in Judea, this contempt and the spirit of rebellion in man, who exalts himself above everything, but who cannot be heavenly (heaven, and all pretension to heaven, is given up by man, and lost by Satan), display themselves by man taking the place of God in His temple under the most advanced form of Jewish apostasy and blasphemy. At the same time Satan acts — God having loosed his bridle — with a power (a lying power indeed, but) which gives the same testimony before men as that which the works of Christ did to the Savior; and also with all the skill that iniquity possesses to deceive. It is in the wicked, the lawless one, that Satan works these things. Our consideration of the development of the latter part of this solemn scene will come (God willing) in the book of Revelation. We may add, that there we have this wicked one as the false Messiah, and as prophet, in the form of his kingdom — two horns like a lamb. He (Satan) had been cast down from heaven where he had been anti-priest, and now takes up Christ's titles on earth of king and prophet. In Daniel 11 he is seen as king; here, as the unbridled man, and in particular as the result of the apostasy,\* and the manifestation of Satan's power. In a word, instead of the assembly, the apostasy; instead of the Holy Ghost, Satan; and, instead of the authority of God as a restraint upon evil, the unbridled man setting himself up as God on the earth.

[\* We may remark that the apostasy develops itself under the three forms in which man has been in relationship with God; Nature — it is the man of sin unrestrained, who exalts himself; Judaism — he sits as God in the temple of God; Christianity — it is to this that the term apostasy is directly applied in the passage before us.]

Another circumstance, already mentioned demands particular attention. I have said that he presents himself as the Messiah (that is to say, in His two characters as king and prophet, which are His earthly characters). In heaven Satan has then nothing more to do; he has been cast out from thence, so that there is no imitation of the Lord's high-priesthood. In that respect Satan had, in his own person, acted another part. He was previously in heaven the accuser of the brethren. But, at the time of which we are speaking, the assembly is on high, and the accuser of the brethren is cast out never to return there. In a man inspired by him he makes himself prophet and king. And in this character he does the same things (in falsehood) as those by which God had sanctioned the mission of Christ before men (compare v. 9 and Acts 2:22). In Greek the words are identical.\* I would also recall here another solemn fact in order to complete this picture. In the history of Elijah we find that the proof of the divinity of Baal, or that of Jehovah, is made to rest upon the fact of their respective servants bringing down fire from heaven. Now in Revelation 13 we learn that the second beast brings down fire from heaven in the sight of men. So that we find here the marvelous works that sanctioned the Lord's mission, and there that which proved Jehovah to be the true and only God. And Satan performs both in order to deceive men.

[\* Only the word for "miracle" or "power" is plural in Acts 2.]

This may give us an idea of the state in which they will be; and it indicates also that these things will take place in relation with the Jews, under the double aspect of their connection with Jehovah and their rejection of Christ and reception of Antichrist.

Thus, thank God, the truth is abundantly confirmed, that these things do not relate to the assembly, but to those who, having had opportunity to profit by the truth, have rejected it, and loved iniquity. Neither does it relate to the heathen, but only to those among whom the truth has been set forth.\* They refused it, and God sends a lie, and an efficacious lie, that they may believe it. He does this in judgment: He did the same thing with the nations (Romans 1:24, 26, 28); He did it also with the Jews (Isaiah 6:9, 10); He does it here with nominal Christians. But it does relate to the Jews as a nation that rejected the truth — the testimony of the Holy Ghost (Acts 7) but still more to Christians (in name); in short to all those who will have had the truth presented to them.

[\* I only allude here to the connection between the renunciation of Christianity and the development of apostate Judaism, which are linked together in the rejection of the true Christ, and the denial of the Father and the Son — features given in 1 John as characteristic of the Antichrist. But I am persuaded that the more we examine the word, the more we shall see (perhaps with surprise) that this fact is confirmed. Moreover the turning back to Judaism, and the tendency to idolatry by the introduction of other mediators and patrons, and the losing sight of our union with the Head, and thus of the perfection and deliverance from the law which are ours in Christ, have, at all times, characterised the mystery of iniquity and the principle of apostasy. The apostle had incessantly to combat this. That of which we spoke above is but its full manifestation.]

With nominal Christians this has necessarily the character of apostasy, or at least it is connected with this apostasy, and is consequent upon it; as verse 3 teaches us, the apostasy takes place, and then the man of sin is revealed.

In connection with his character of the man of sin he presents himself without restraint in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.\* In relation to the lying power of Satan and his efficient work, he presents himself in the character of Christ — he is the Antichrist, assuming consequently a Jewish character. It is not only the pride of man exalting itself against God, but the power of Satan in man deceiving men, and the Jews in particular, by a false Christ; so that, if it were possible, the very elect would be deceived. We may remark that all these characters are precisely the opposite of Christ — falsehood instead of truth, iniquity instead of righteousness, perdition instead of salvation.

[\* This is the culminating point in his character as an apostate who has renounced grace. The ninth and following verses develop his positive and deceitful activity by which he seeks to win men. This explains the mixture (which, moreover, generally exists) of atheism in will, and superstition.]

It is to a power like this, of lies and destruction that man — having forsaken Christianity and exalted himself in pride against God — will be given up. The apostasy (that is to say, the renunciation of Christianity) will be the occasion of this evil; Judea and the Jews, the scene in which it ripens and develops itself in a positive way.

The Antichrist will deny the Father and the Son (that is, Christianity); he will deny that Jesus is the Christ (this is, Jewish unbelief). With the burden upon him of sin against Christianity, grace, and the presence of the

Holy Ghost, he will ally himself with Jewish unbelief, in order that there may be not only the full expression of human pride, but also for a time the satanic influence of a false Christ, who will strengthen the throne of Satan among the Gentiles occupied by the first beast to whom the authority of the dragon has been given. He will also set up his own subordinate throne over the Jews, as being the Messiah, whom their unbelief is expecting; while at the same time he will bring in idolatry, the unclean spirit long gone out who then returns to his house which is devoid of God.

And now, with regard to his destruction (whom the Lord Jesus will consume with the spirit of His mouth and destroy with the manifestation of His presence, or of His coming), the first of these means characterises the judgment; it is the word of truth applied in judgment according to the power of God. In the Revelation, it says that the sword proceeds out of His mouth. Here He is not spoken of in the character of a man of war, as in Revelation 19. The spirit of His mouth is that inward and divine power which kindles and executes the judgment. It is not an instrument, it is the divine source of power which executes its purpose by a word (compare Isaiah 30:33). But there is another aspect of this judgment. The Lord, the Man Jesus, will return. His return has two parts — the return into the air to take His assembly to Himself, and the public manifestation in glory of His return.

In the first verse of our chapter we have read of His return and our gathering together unto Him. Here, verse 8, is the manifestation of His presence publicly in creation. At the time of this public manifestation of His coming He destroys the whole work and power of the wicked one. It is the Man formerly obedient and humbling Himself on the earth, exalted of God, and become Lord of all, who destroys the lawless man that has exalted himself above everything and made himself as God, instead of being obedient to God.

This evil — on the side of Satan's influence — was already working in the apostle's time; only it was bridled and kept back, until that which restrained it should no longer be on the scene. Then should the wicked one be revealed. To sum up, the taking away of the assembly, and the apostasy, were first necessary; and then this man should present himself as an unbelieving Jew,\* and the power of Satan would be displayed in him.



[\* I do not say that his first appearance will be the apostasy of Judaism; I do not think it will be. He will present himself to them as being the Christ, but according to the hopes and passions of the Jews. But afterwards it will be an apostasy even from Judaism, as had partially been the case in the days of the Maccabees fact which the Spirit uses in Daniel 11, as a figure precursive of the time of Antichrist. He is from his first appearance an unbeliever and the enemy of God, an apostate as to the assembly, and denying that Jesus is the Christ. We are taught positively by John, that the rejection of Christianity and Jewish unbelief are united in the Antichrist. It appears that apostasy with regard to Christianity and Jewish unbelief are connected and go together; and afterwards Jewish apostasy and open rebellion against God, which, causing the cry of the remnant, brings in the Lord, and all is ended. Now the apostle (chap. 2:3, 4) presents the complete picture of man's iniquity, developed when apostasy from the grace of the gospel had taken place (he exalts himself even to the making himself God), without touching the Jewish side or the manifested power of Satan. These verses show us the man of sin is the result of the apostasy which will break out in the midst of Christendom. Verse 9 begins to teach us in addition, that the coming of this wicked one is also in immediate connection with a mighty display of the energy of Satan, who deceives by means of marvelous works and a strong delusion to which God gives men up, and of which we have spoken in the text. It is man and Satan here, with enough to show its connection with Judaism in the last days (even as the mystery of iniquity was linked with Judaism in the days of the apostle), although it is not the occasion of giving the details of the Jewish development of the evil. We must look for these details elsewhere, where they are in their place, as in Daniel. The Apocalypse and 1 John furnish us with the means of connecting them: we do but allude here to this connection.]

Now this satanic influence was for those who had rejected the truth. Of the Thessalonians — to whom he had given these explanations respecting the day which they fancied was come — the apostle thought very differently. God had chosen these “brethren beloved of the Lord” from the beginning for salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, to which He had called them by Paul’s gospel (and that of his companions), and to the obtaining of the glory of the Lord Jesus. How different was this from the visitations of the day of the Lord, and the circumstances of which the apostle had spoken! They were numbered among those who should be the companions in that day of the Lord Jesus Himself.

There is nothing very particular in the apostle’s exhortations. His great concern was the explanation which we have been considering. He prays that God and the Lord Jesus Himself, who had given them the sure and everlasting consolations of the gospel, would comfort their hearts and

establish them in every good word and work. He asks for their prayers that he may be preserved in his labors. He could not but expect to find men unreasonable and animated with enmity, for faith was not the portion of all. It was only a case for the protecting hand of God. With regard to them he counted for this end on the faithfulness of the Lord. He reckoned also on their obedience, and prays God to direct their hearts towards these two points, of which we have spoken when studying the first epistle, the love of God and the patient waiting with which the Christ waited — the two points in which the whole of christian life is summed up with regard to its objects, its moral springs. Christ Himself was waiting — sweet thought! They were to wait with Him, until the moment when His heart and the hearts of His own should rejoice together in their meeting.

It was this which they needed. On the one hand, they had believed that the dead saints would not be ready to go and meet the Lord; on the other, they had thought the day of the Lord already come. The enjoyment of the love of God, and peace of heart in waiting for Christ, was necessary for them.

This excitement into which they had been led had also betrayed itself in some among them by their neglect of their ordinary labors, “working not at all, but being busybodies,” intermeddling in the affairs of others. The apostle had set them a very different example. He exhorts them to be firm, and to withdraw from those who would not hearken to his admonitions, but continued to walk disorderly and in idleness; not however in such a manner as to treat them as enemies, but to admonish them as brethren.

It will be observed here, that there is no longer the same expression of the energy of communion and of life as previously (compare chap. 3:16 with 1 Thessalonians 5:23). Nevertheless the Lord was still the Lord of peace; but the beauty of that entire consecration to God, which would shine forth in the day of Christ, does not present itself to the apostle’s mind and heart as in the first epistle. He prays for them, however, that they may have peace always and by all means.

The apostle points out the method by which he assured the faithful of the authenticity of his letters. With the exception of that to the Galatians he employed other persons to write them, but he attached his own signature in order to verify their contents to the church, adding the prayer or blessing.

# 1 TIMOTHY

The epistles to Timothy and Titus have naturally a peculiar bearing and character, being addressed to persons deputed by the apostle to act in his name, or to care for the churches during his absence. Their application to us is none the less direct on this account, because they not only instruct us with regard to the state of the church, and the pastoral care which the apostle bestowed on it, but the line of conduct in which Timothy is charged to lead the faithful is that which the faithful ought always themselves to follow. Nevertheless to confound the directions given to Timothy and Titus with the words addressed immediately to the faithful, would be to cast confusion upon ministry in its best sense.

A great part of this first epistle to Timothy requires but little development; not because it is without importance, but because it contains directions — so plain and simple that explanation would be superfluous — and practical exhortations which would only be obscured and their force and point taken away by attempting to enlarge upon them.

On the other hand, some general principles of great importance for the position of the assembly in general are contained in this epistle.

God assumes here, in a peculiar way, the character of a Savior-God with regard to the world: a principle of great importance in all that concerns our conversation in the world and our intercourse with men. We represent in our religious character a God of love. This was not the case in Judaism. He was indeed the same God; but there He took the character of a Lawgiver. All were indeed to come to His temple according to the declaration of the prophets, and His temple was open to them; but He did not characterise Himself as a Savior-God for all. In Titus we find the same expression.

In these confidential communications to his dear children in the faith, and companions in the work, we can understand that the apostle would clearly establish the great principles on which the administration committed to him rested. That all men were the objects of God's dealings in grace was the general basis on which this administration was founded — that the character of God towards the world was that of a Savior (compare 2

Corinthians 5). The law has its place and it still has it, as the apostle shows — the conviction of unrighteous men.\* But the sovereign mercy of God was the starting-point of all that the apostle had to declare. This thought, this spirit, was to govern the worship even of believers. Details follow. Notwithstanding this love to the world, there was upon the earth an assembly of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth, and the witness to it on earth. The Person of Christ, and all that concerns Him, is the subject of its confession, the foundation of its existence, and the object of its faith. This faith would be assailed in the last days by the enemy, who, under the pretense of sanctity, would set himself up against God the Creator and Preserver of all men and of believers in particular. Directions for the walk of the assembly compose the remainder of the epistle. Conduct suitable to all is set before Timothy to make him, as well as ourselves, understand that which befits the assembly of God. We will now look more closely into the contents of this epistle.

[\* Not here, specially, that any one is under it, or that it is a rule of life for a people of God, but a rule of right and wrong to demonstrate evil to any conscience. In verse 5 we have the end of the commission of the gospel on the other hand, partaking of the divine nature — love and holiness, acting up to responsibility, a good conscience and the heart fully devoted to God, receiving His word and trusting Him.]

From its commencement the apostle designates God as the Savior-God. Paul is the apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ is the confidence and the hope of the soul.

We observe also that the apostle's wish differs from that which he expresses when addressing an assembly; "Grace, mercy," he says, "and peace." He does not say "mercy" to the assemblies, which stand before God as such, in consequence of the mercy shown them, and which (however low their condition might be) are viewed as assemblies according to the nature in which they live by the Spirit, in which there is no question of mercy, because that nature is itself of God. Grace and peace are that which they are to enjoy on the part of God. But when an individual is in question, whatever his piety or faithfulness may be, he is both flesh and spirit, his career has yet in part at least to be provided for, having always need of mercy. Therefore the apostle wishes it to Timothy as well as to Titus.\* In the case of Philemon he adds "the church in thy house," and his wish has therefore no longer the personal form. But with Timothy and

Titus it is the apostle's intimacy with his beloved fellow-laborers. He knew how much they needed mercy. It was his own resource, that which he had experienced for the comfort of his own soul.

[\* There is, however, some question as to the reading in Titus.]

The special object for which Paul had left Timothy at Ephesus, when he went into Macedonia, was that he might watch over the doctrine which was taught; but, being there, he gives him directions for the interior order of the assembly. the evil which the enemy sought to introduce, with regard to doctrine, had a twofold character; fables of human imagination, and the introduction of the law into Christianity. As to the former, it was pure evil and edified no one. The apostle does not here say much about it; he forewarned them of the evil; and the faith of the assembly at Ephesus was sound enough to allow him to treat the whole system as mere fables and genealogies. The Spirit gave warning, that in later times it would have more disastrous consequences; but at present there was only need to guard the faithful from it as that which was worthless. Timothy was charged by the apostle to attend to this.

But that which is committed to us in Christianity, as service, is always, both in its object and its character, at the height of the eternal principles of God, and belongs to the foundation of our moral relations with Him.

The object of Paul's mandate is the love of a pure heart, a good conscience, and faith unfeigned, and never the subtleties of argument or of human imagination. This is a sure token for souls that are sound in the faith and guided by the Spirit of God. Speculative questions do not act on the conscience, nor bring into the presence of God. Some had forsaken these great landmarks of Christianity, turning aside to vain discussions. And here we again find those same corrupters of Christianity, who, after having rejected the Savior, sowed the apostle's path with thorns — Judaising teachers. They desired to inculcate the law. The human mind is adequate to this.

Now we see here the way in which one who is at the height of the truth of God can put everything in its true place. Paul treats the produce of human imagination as mere fables, but the law was of God, and could be made useful if rightly employed. It was of great service to condemn, to judge

evil, to slay — to show the judgment of God against every wrong thing forbidden by the gospel which revealed the glory of the blessed God — a glory which tolerated no evil and which had been committed to the apostle. It could be used to act upon the conscience in this way, but it did not build up the righteous; and, if any were under the law, they were under the curse. As a sword for the conscience, it may be used. But grace alone is the source of our preaching and the stay of our souls.

These two systems and their respective places are presented in verses 5-17, which form a kind of parenthesis, the apostle resuming his address to Timothy in verse 18. The use of the law is explained in verses 8-13. The apostle in a certain sense lowers it here, while acknowledging its utility in its place, as the weapon of righteousness for condemnation, and contrasts it with the gospel which is connected with the glory of God Himself which this gospel proclaims, as the law is connected with the wickedness which it condemns.

Having spoken of the gospel of the glory which had been committed to him, the apostle turns to the sovereign grace that brought him into the knowledge of this glory which is the testimony to the accomplishment of the work of grace.

“I give thanks,” he says, “to Jesus Christ our Lord, who hath counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer and persecutor and injurious.” This indeed was grace.

The apostle speaks of two things in his conversion: the one, how God could have compassion on him in such a state — he was in ignorance; the other, the purpose of God that the apostle should be a pattern of grace to all. That he was in ignorance and unbelief, although a condition which made mercy possible (for had he been an enemy, knowing and willing it, while acquainted with the grace of the gospel, it would have been impossible), yet that condition was no excuse for his sin; he puts pure and perfect grace forward, as having abounded in his case — he was the chief of sinners. This indeed was true. The high priests had resisted the Holy Ghost to the uttermost. Paul had joined them in it: but he was not satisfied with that. He desired to be the active enemy of the faith wherever it existed, and to destroy the name of Jesus. He had done much at Jerusalem, but he wished to satiate his hatred even in foreign cities. We know his history in the

Acts. The living expression of Jewish resistance to grace, he was also among men the expression of the most active human enmity to Him whom God would glorify. Grace was greater than the sin, the patience of God more perfect than the perseverance of man's hostility. The latter was limited by man's importance, the former has no limit in the nature of God but that of His own sovereign will. Guilty as man may be, his sin cannot so reach God as to disturb the independent action of His nature or change His purposes. He was pleased to show forth in Paul a pattern of the sovereignty of that grace and perfect goodness — to the Jews hereafter, who as a nation will be in Saul's condition — to all men as the enemies of God and by nature children of wrath. The chief, the most active, the most inveterate of enemies was the best and most powerful of witnesses that the grace of God abounded over sin, and that the work of Christ was perfect to put it away.

"Unto God" — being such in His nature, and having the development of all the ages in His counsels — "unto the only God, invisible, incorruptible," he ascribes all praise and all glory. Such was the foundation of Paul's ministry in contrast with the law. It was founded on the revelation of grace; but it was a revelation connected with the experience of its application to his own case. Peter, guilty of denying a living Savior, could speak to the Jews of grace that met their case, which was his own; Paul, formerly the enemy of a glorified Savior and the resister of the Holy Ghost, could proclaim grace that rose above even that state of sinfulness, above all that could flow from human nature — grace that opened the door to the Gentiles according to God's own counsels, when the Jews had rejected everything, substituting the heavenly assembly for them — grace that sufficed for the future admission of that guilty nation to better privileges than those which they had forfeited.

Such was the call of this apostle, such his ministry. Having shown the opposition between that which was committed to him and the law (while affirming the usefulness of the latter, not as a rule to the righteous, or a guide to God's people, but as judging wrong), he resumes his address to Timothy in that which refers to the details of his mission among the Ephesians

At the end of chapter 1 he commits the charge to him — sends him his mandate. The term he employs relates to verses 3 and 5. He had left Timothy at Ephesus in order to command some persons there not to teach other doctrines than the truths of the gospel. Now the end of the command, of this evangelical commission, was love flowing from a pure heart and a good conscience and faith unfeigned. For the gospel, while revealing the marvelous counsels of God, maintains the great eternal principles of His nature. It is this which distinguishes truth from the lofty pretensions of heretical imaginations; it requires that man should be in relationship with God really in heart and in truth according to those principles. And this commission the apostle now entrusted to Timothy, his own son in the faith. He was to maintain it with an authority that had its basis in divine testimony, but which he held formally from the apostle who appointed him to it; not merely of his own accord, but according to prophecies which had pointed him out for this purpose, and which were a means of strength to him in the conflict he was thus brought into. The conditions of victory were in accordance with the nature of the commission. He was to keep the faith and a good conscience. Now faith here is the doctrine of Christianity; yet not merely as doctrine, but as that which the soul held between itself and God as coming from Him. He had to maintain the truth, the christian doctrine, but to hold it as so revealed by God Himself to the soul that it should be the truth. The light should possess, with well-defined outlines, the authority of God.

It was the faith, that which God had revealed, received with certainty as such — as the truth.

But, to be in communion with God, the conscience must be good, must be pure; and if we are not in communion with God, we cannot have the strength that would maintain us in the faith, that would enable us to persevere in the profession of the truth, as God gives it to us. Satan has then a hold upon us, and if the intellect of one in this state is active, he falls into heresy. The loss of a good conscience opens the door to Satan, because it deprives us of communion with God; and the active mind, under Satan's influence, invents ideas instead of confessing the truth of God. The apostle treats the fruit of this state as "blasphemies"; the will of man is at work, and the higher the subject, the more an unbridled will, possessed by the enemy, goes astray, and exalts itself against God, and against the



subjection of the whole mind to the obedience of Christ, to the authority of the revelation of God.

The apostle had delivered up two persons of this character to Satan — that is to say, outwardly. Though already deceived by him, they were not under his dominion as having power to torment and make them suffer. For in the assembly (when in its normal state) Satan has no power of that kind. It is guarded from it, being the dwelling place of the Holy Ghost, and protected by God and by the power of Christ. Satan can tempt us individually; but he has no right over the members of the assembly as such. They are within, and, weak as they may be, Satan cannot enter there. They may be delivered to him for their good. This may take place at all times — witness the history of Job. But the assembly ought to have the knowledge, and be the guardian and instrument of the accomplishment of the dealings of God with His own. Within the assembly is the Holy Ghost; God dwells in it as His house by the Spirit. Without is the world of which Satan is the prince. The apostle (by the power bestowed on him,\* for it is an act of positive power) delivered these two men into the power of the enemy — deprived them of the shelter they had enjoyed. They had listened to the enemy — had been his instruments. It was not in the assembly, with members of Christ, that this should have taken place. They must be made to feel what he was to whom they had given ear. God thus made use of Satan himself as a rod for the good of His rebellious children. Satan should instruct them, through the pains he would make them suffer, of whatever kind it might be, whether anguish of soul or of body, and the latter is the immediate effect, in order that their will might be broken and brought into subjection to God. Solemn discipline! Marvellous power in the hands of man! but a proof that the love of God can order all things for the purpose of delivering a soul and bringing it to Himself.

[\* We must not confound this act of power with discipline, which is the act of the assembly and its formal duty. In 1 Corinthians 5 the apostle joins the assembly to himself in this act of power, but he delivered with the power of Christ. The duty of the assembly is stated there in verse 13. As to the saints' or assembly's part, when God has exercised discipline, see 1 John 5:16; James 5:14, 15.]

The apostle proceeds to give instructions, founded on the great principles which he had established — on grace. The Jewish spirit might look on Gentile kings as enemies, and on Gentiles in general as unworthy of divine

favor. The persecution of which Christians were the object gave the flesh occasion to nourish these dispositions and to enter into the spirit of the law. Grace rises above all these thoughts — all these feelings of the heart. It teaches us to think of all men with love. We belong to a Savior-God, who acts in the gospel towards all men with love. Especially were they to pray for kings and those who had places in the world, that God would dispose their hearts to allow us to live in peace and quietness in all honesty. This was well-pleasing to a Savior-God, who was willing that all men should be saved and be brought to know the truth. The subject here is not the counsels of God but His dealings with men under the gospel. He acts in grace. It is the acceptable time — the day of salvation. He opens the door through the blood of Christ, and proclaims peace and a sure reception to all who come. The work is done; His character fully glorified with regard to sin. If they refuse to come, that is the will of man. That God will fulfill His counsels after all makes no change in His dealings, nor in the responsibility of men. We have love to proclaim to all — in the spirit of love in our ways towards them. The distinction between Jew and Gentile totally disappears here. There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, a Man, Christ Jesus. These are the two great truths which form the basis of all true religion. Judaism had already been the revelation and testimony in the world of the first: there was one only God. This remains eternally true, but did not suffice to bring men into relationship with God. With regard to men He abode within the veil in the darkness which shrouded His majesty. Christianity, while fully revealing the one God, presents the second truth: there is one Mediator between God and men. There is one, and there is but one. It is as true that there is but one Mediator as that there is but one God. This is the great and distinctive truth of Christianity.

Two things here characterise the Mediator. He is a man; He gave Himself a ransom for all. The time for this testimony was ordered of God.

Precious truth! We are in weakness, we are guilty, we could not bring ourselves near to God. We needed a Mediator who, while maintaining the glory of God, should put us into such a position that He could present us to God in righteousness according to that glory. Christ gave Himself as a ransom. But He must be a man in order to suffer for men, and to represent men. And this He was. But this is not all. We are weak — here, where we

are to receive the revelation of God; and weak, with regard to the use of our resources in God and our communion with Him — even when our guilt is blotted out. And, in our weakness to receive the revelation of God, Christ has revealed God, and all that He is in His own Person, in all the circumstances wherein man could have need either in body or in soul. He came down into the lowest depths in order that there should be none, even of the most wretched, who could not feel that God in His goodness was near him and was entirely accessible to him — come down to him — His love finding its occasion in misery; and that there was no need to which He was not present, which He could not meet.

It is thus that He made Himself known on earth; and, now that He is on high, He is still the same. He does not forget His human experiences: they are perpetuated by His divine power in the sympathising feelings of His humanity, according to the energy of that divine love which was their source and their motive power. He is still a man in glory, and in divine perfection. His divinity imparts the strength of its love to His humanity, but does not set aside the latter. Nothing could resemble such a Mediator as this; nothing could equal the tenderness, the knowledge of the human heart, the sympathy, the experience of need. In the measure which divinity could give to what He did, and in the strength of its love, He came down, took part in all the sorrows of humanity, and entered into all the circumstances in which the human heart could be, and was wounded, oppressed, and discouraged, bowing down under the evil. No tenderness, no power of sympathy, no humanity, like His; no human heart that can so understand, so feel with us, whatever the burden may be that oppressed the heart of man. It is the Man, the Christ Jesus, who is our Mediator; none so near, none who has come down so low, and entered with divine power into the need, and all the need, of man. The conscience is purified by His work, the heart relieved by that which He was, and which He is for ever.

There is but One: to think of another would be to snatch from Him His glory, and from us our perfect consolation. His coming from on high, His divine nature, His death, His life as Man in heaven, all point Him out as the one and only Mediator.

But there is another aspect of this truth, and of the fact that He is a Man. It is, that He is not merely a Mediator as a Priest upon His throne, between Israel and the Lord; not simply the Messiah, in order to place Israel in relationship with their God, but a Man between God and men. It is according to the eternal nature of God Himself and to the need of men in His presence. It was of these truths, eternal and of universal bearing, that Paul was the herald and the apostle.

Possessing a character that belongs to all ages and that goes beyond them, all these facts had their time to be revealed.

All means dependent on man's use of them had been tried with men — and in vain, as to recalling him to God; and now the necessary foundations of their relationship with God had to be set forth, laid by God Himself, and the Gentiles were to hear the testimony of grace. And such was the apostle's testimony, "a teacher of the Gentiles in the faith and in the truth."

Paul has plainly now laid the foundations, and he proceeds therefore to details. Men were to pray everywhere, lifting up pure hands, without wrath, and without vain human reasonings. Women were to walk in modesty, adorned with good works, and to learn in silence. A woman was forbidden to teach or to exercise authority over men; she was to abide in quietness and silence. The reason given for this is remarkable, and shows how, in our relations with God, everything depends on the original starting-point. In innocence Adam had the first place; in sin, Eve. It was Eve who, being deceived, brought in transgression. Adam was not deceived, guilty as he was of disobeying God. United to his wife, he followed her, not deceived by the enemy but weak through his affection. Without the weakness, it was this which the second Adam did in grace; He followed His deceived and guilty bride, but in order to redeem and deliver her by taking her faults upon Himself. Eve suffered on earth the penalty of her fault in a way which is a mark of the judgment of God; but walking in modesty, with faith and love and holiness, she shall be delivered in the hour of her trial; and that which bears the stamp of judgment shall be an occasion of the mercy and succor of God.

The apostle next points out to Timothy the qualities necessary for a bishop or a deacon, as well as for the wife of the latter.\* He supposes here

that there were some who desired to undertake this work. It was a good work. To care for souls and have a vigilant eye upon the walk of believers; to watch over them in order that the members of Christ should answer to His love and lose no christian privilege; to do this by maintaining that happy order and that precious unity which were realised at that time, and to protect the flock of the Lord against the ravaging wolves that were seeking to invade it: this indeed was valuable work, and he on whose heart the Lord had thus laid the souls of His people might well desire to undertake it. The apostle felt this: it was a true and faithful saying; but certain qualities were needed to make any one fit for such a charge. Gifts are not included among them, unless the being “apt to teach” might be so considered; but even this is presented as a quality — the man must have aptness\*\* for it — not as a gift. Power to use such truth with others was very useful in fulfilling his charge, without saying at all that he taught publicly in the assembly. The essential thing was that which gave moral weight.

[\* So it would read in English, but I see no reason why it should not apply to the elders’ (bishop’s) wives. It runs really thus, “In like manner the] deacons.... In like manner the] wives.”

[\*\* Some translate this word, “ready to learn.”

Timothy was not left at Ephesus to appoint elders; but these were the qualities necessary to a bishop, and Paul exhorts him to be watchful on this point.

It is not needful to enter into the details of these qualities; they are plain enough, as well as those required for a deacon.

We see what was the subject of “the condemnation of the devil”: he exalted himself at the thought of his own importance (compare Ezekiel 28). “The snare of the devil” is another thing. If a man is not of good report, he will yield somewhere to the enemy, because he will not dare to withstand him boldly.

It will be noticed that the apostle speaks of the wives of deacons, and not those of bishops\* (except to say that these must be the husbands of one wife only). Bishops had a charge, in which they were occupied with souls and exercised authority in the church, in which women were not to act. Deacons were necessarily occupied with family details and circumstances.

In these women might well be concerned and often very useful. In the spiritual cares of elders they had nothing to do. It was requisite therefore that the wives of deacons should possess qualities which would cause their husbands to be respected, and at the same time guard themselves from becoming busybodies and tale-bearers.

[\* So it would read in English, but I see no reason why it should not apply to the elders' (bishop's) wives. It runs really thus, "In like manner the] deacons.... In like manner the] wives."

Faithfulness in the charge of a deacon — the exercise of which in fact is a matter of the greatest delicacy, and requires much christian love and patience — was a means of acquiring strength in the work of God. Stephen and Philip are examples of this: their spiritual powers soon carried them beyond their services as deacons.

What was the assembly in those happy days? That which surely it always is in the sight of God; but then in fact, when love displayed itself in an order maintained by the energy of the Holy Ghost, and when the oneness of the entire body developed itself in the action of all its members, it was the house of God. Thank God, it is so always; yet what a difference since then in its practical condition!

But let us here examine the character which the apostle gives to the assembly on earth. He wrote hoping soon to come, but in order that, in case he might tarry long, Timothy should know how to conduct himself. He then tells us what the assembly is.

In the first place it is the house of God. God dwells in it upon the earth (compare Ephesians 2:22). We understand that it is here viewed as on the earth, because the apostle is speaking of how to behave in it. But this truth is important. It gives a character to the assembly of the highest importance for us with regard to our responsibility. It is not a vague thing, composed of the dead, of the living — a thing which we know not where to find, because one part of it is alive on the earth and another part consists of souls in heaven. It is the house of God here below, in which we have to behave (whatever other position we may hold) in a manner that becomes the house of God. God dwells in the assembly upon earth. We cannot too earnestly remember this fact. Whatever would bring confusion into the presentation of the truth, through the idea that some are dead and that the

whole assembly is not here, comes from the enemy and is in opposition to the word. The assembly, viewed as subsisting on earth, is the house of God.

In the second place it is the assembly of the living God. God in whom is the power of life, in contrast with men and with dead idols, has an assembly not of the world, having set it apart for Himself. It is not a nation like Israel. That people were the assembly of God in the wilderness. The assembly is now the assembly of the living God.

In the third place it is the pillar and support of the truth. Christ on earth was the Truth. He is so always, but He was so on the earth. He is now hidden in God. The assembly is not the truth: the word of God is the truth. His word is truth. Truth exists before the assembly; it is faith in the truth which gathers the assembly together. But the assembly is that which maintains the truth on earth.\* When the assembly is gone, men will be given up to a strong delusion.

[\* But the assembly does not teach. Teachers teach the assembly, but by faithfulness in holding fast the truth taught, it sustains it in the world.]

It may be that there is only a little remnant of those that call themselves Christians who maintain the word of truth; but it is not the less true that the assembly — as long as it remains here below — is the only witness for the truth upon the earth. It is God's witness to present the truth before men. At the end that which God owns as such will be the feeble flock at Philadelphia; and then that which is in the responsible position of being the assembly (Laodicea) will be spued out of the mouth of Christ, who Himself takes the character of Amen, the faithful and true Witness. But the assembly as planted by God on the earth is the pillar and support of the truth. Authority is not the question here, but the maintenance and presentation of the truth. That which does not maintain and present the truth is not the assembly as God understands it.

The presence, then, of the living God, and the profession of the truth, are the characteristics of the house of God. Wherever this assembly of the living God is, wherever the truth is, there is His house.\*

[\* Thus, in order to judge what the assembly is, we must know and be able to distinguish the truth and the living God. It is this which the apostle says with regard to the individual, "the Spirit is truth." These are the cardinal

points with regard to unbelief and faith, the truth and the Spirit; and the word of God is the truth.]

The mystery of piety, which lies at the very center of what the assembly maintains before the world, is great, and relates essentially to the Person of Christ. The apostle naturally does not here develop all the different parts of the truth, but that which is the living center of the whole — that which is essential to the relations between God and men.

God had been manifested in the flesh; marvelous truth in fact! There, where all is confusion and sin, in the nature of him in whom all this sin and all this confusion are introduced, the Center of all blessing, He who is Light itself, He who as the light puts everything morally in its place, and who by the fact of His presence shows that love is above everything, God who is love, has been manifest in the flesh. Where sin was, there was love above the sin. Man, who is the slave of evil, sees here in his own nature the source and the power of all good. In the center of evil and of weakness, in human nature, God Himself has been manifested. Was there then evil in Him who was such? Did He undergo the lot of the common bondage? By no means. Truly in the same circumstances, in the same nature, He proved superior to all evil, perfect in all respects. The absence of all sin was made evident by the power of the Holy Ghost during His whole life (if men had been able to discern it; and, in fact, it was manifest to the conscience of every man, for He was pure light shining upon all), and with power by the resurrection (compare Romans 1:4).

Thus God was made visible to the angels, was preached to the Gentiles (not merely the God of the Jews), became the object of faith in the world (it was not the manifestation of visible power, claiming His rights and His glory), and at last took a place on high in the glory whence He had descended. It is thus that God is known in the assembly according to the truth. There is no truth outside the maintenance of this revelation of the Person of Christ.

It is worthy of notice that in this epistle, and even in the second, the apostle speaks nowhere of the relationship of Christians with God as His children, of the privileges of children, or of that which is known within in the intimacy of the family. He speaks of truths that are essential as testimony before the world; that which the assembly is externally, that



which it is as witness of God towards men. It is the house of God, the assembly of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth: that which it is as responsible in the world, and in order that all should learn what God is. The mystery of piety, of which the assembly is the vessel for testimony, answers to this. It is the grand essential truth on which all relation between God and men is founded, by means of which God has to do with men. Therefore also he says previously, “There is but one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.”

We have not here the privileges of children, nor the heavenly bride of Christ, but the foundation of God’s relations with all men. Thus the Father is not named, nor even the Spirit, except here in connection with the Lord’s Person, as the justification of His testimony. It is God, the Mediator, and man, and the assembly as the vessel and depositary of this truth of the testimony of God; or else evil spirits turning men away from the faith. This deserves all attention.

Not only, as we have seen elsewhere, the testimony of the grace of the gospel maintains the great eternal principles of the nature and glory of God, and His relations according to that glory with men; but even in the pains the apostle takes that the assembly may be cared for and guarded, during his absence, from the assaults of the enemy and from disorder and improprieties within; it is not of its internal privileges that he speaks. God is set before us, and the Lord Jesus Christ. God, in the majesty of His immutable truth, in His relations with men as such, and in the revelation of Himself in the flesh — God was in Christ, reconciling the world; dwelling in the assembly, in order that it should present and maintain the truth before the world — the truth (as we have seen) with regard to Christ, of the revelation of God in Him. God desires to be in relation with men: it is thus that He accomplishes it. The assembly maintains the rights of the Creator and Savior-God on the earth. The assembly itself must be maintained in moral order, that it may confront the enemy who is in the world, and be able to sustain this testimony.

But there would be some who departed from the faith, from this knowledge of the one Creator and Savior-God — Him who was manifested in the flesh. They would attack precisely these points which we have named. It might be that they would pretend to carry the idea of christian

privileges farther than all others had done, as well as that of profound knowledge of God; but they would sin against first principles, against the faith which connected the Savior-God revealed in Christianity with the one only Creator-God. According to Christianity, the eternal God had not only created the world but had revealed Himself in Christ. These apostates, bringing in doctrines of demons, would seek to deny that it was this one and only God of nature who had manifested Himself in grace. Seduced by demons, and their conscience being seared, they forbade that which God had established in creation, that which He had given to man in full right after the flood: as though the superior holiness which they preached, and relationship with a more exalted God, were not consistent with such customs. Forsaking the real and practical holiness of communion with God, and of His commandments by Christ, they created a false sanctity for themselves, which denied that which God had ordained from the beginning, and thus exalted themselves against the authority of Him who had ordained it, as though He was an imperfect or perhaps evil being.

Thus the restraint of the fear of God was lost, and the door opened to licence and dissoluteness. The Spirit of God warned the assembly of this, and the faithful apostle communicates it to Timothy and through him puts the faithful on their guard. He does not therefore speak of privilege.

Faithful to the glory of God, he returns to the first principles of His glory, and maintains the incontestable rights of the one and only God; faithful to God, not making boast of his knowledge, but seeking in love to guard the assembly from all departure from God.

We must not confound the few here who forsake the faith with the general apostasy of 2 Thessalonians. Here a few depart from the truth, seduced by demons; and the assembly still subsists to be guarded from the invasion of these hurtful principles. Quite another thing is the general apostasy, and the manifestation of the man of sin, which is not mentioned here at all.

Here we have the faithfulness which repels error by truth, reminding the brethren of the latter, in order that they may not be seduced. There it is the manifestation of the one who sits in the temple of God, and who is destroyed by the brightness of the Lord's presence. Here all that had to be done was to recall in simplicity the goodness of the Creator, and that His gifts, received with thanksgiving, were always good, and not to be refused:

assuredly not that they were to use them for the gratification of their lusts, but as sanctified by the word of God, which brought them to us as God's gifts, and by prayer, which connects us with God in using them. They were to be received as from Him, as the gift of His hand; and they were sanctified, as is the case with everything that comes from Him and bears the stamp of His will and His goodness. Man had forfeited everything in forsaking God: what he had he had not now with God, would eat merely as an animal, and worse as having left God. The word of God replaced the relationship in grace, and prayer used it on this footing. Here (although in other circumstances it has gone much farther) the monastic principle, in the heart and in form, is fully judged; however sincere any individual may be who seeks to follow it in order to honor God. God does not withdraw the gifts on which man, so to speak, has seized by his will; but his use of them, instead of being the gratification of his will and lusts, is now as received from God by His will in thankfulness, and owning Him.

This in fact the apostle shows in that which follows. By teaching thus Timothy would be a good servant of Jesus Christ, nourished in the truth: bodily exercise profited little, but godliness much — both here below and for eternity; warning him again against the idle and profitless speculation of the human mind, to the danger of which he continually recurs. It is for this doctrine of God — true and worthy of all acceptance — that the apostle labored and suffered reproach; because he had faith in the living God, who, by His providence and by His supreme power,\* governed, preserved, and took care of all men, and especially of those that believed. It was this same only God, Creator and Savior, in whom he trusted while laboring for the Lord. Timothy was to teach this and enforce it with authority.

[\* Compare Matthew 10:29.]

Afterwards, in connection with this authoritative instruction, the apostle speaks of the person and position of Timothy himself. He was young, but he was to maintain his place, and gain by his conduct that weight which years did not yet give him. He was to be an example to the believers, and occupy himself, till Paul came, with reading, exhortation, and instruction. Moreover, in his case God had given a special preparation for his work; he was not to forget or neglect it. A gift had been imparted to him: God had pointed him out to this end by prophecy; and this immediate testimony

from God, to which the operation of His power was united, had been accompanied by the seal of testimony from man, that is, that of the elders among the Christians (compare Acts 13:1-3).

Thus all things concurred to strengthen Timothy in his service, and in the authority that he exercised at that moment in place of the apostle. He should always present the weight of an irreproachable conduct, which would have its influence over hearts and consciences; but he was inwardly strengthened by the consciousness of having been formally set apart by God for the work; the gift of God had been imparted to him, and the sanction of all that had weight in the assembly had been laid, as a seal, upon him. Thus strengthened, he was to devote himself to the things of the Lord in such a manner, that his progress should be evident to all men — a demonstration of his communion with the Lord. At the same time he was to take heed to himself and to the doctrine, and that continually, which should be the means of salvation both to himself and to those who heard him.

Having thus considered the laborer, the apostle returns to the details of the work, in which Timothy was to display his diligence and watchful care. Everywhere here the subject is that which is suitable outwardly to an upright walk, that which is seemly, whether with regard to the position of individuals, or with respect to the world. The apostle speaks of elders; of widows, of that which is becoming for younger widows; of the honor due to faithful elders, those among them especially who were teachers also. There is nothing inward, nothing of the soul's relationships to God; but everything refers to the public testimony which suited the position of men in this world before God. It is important to remark this, that although our joy lies in our heavenly privileges, in our communion, yet we can never with impunity neglect ordinary duties or moral proprieties; we must take knowledge of the practical dangers that would beset us, owing to that which the flesh is.

We may notice that provision was made for all widows who had no relatives able to maintain them; and also that there were elders who did not teach.

Against an elder, Timothy was not to receive an accusation, unless there were two or three witnesses.

All this bears testimony to the fact, that the apostle gives these directions with a view to outward order; for the maintenance of that which is respectable in the eyes of all, and of respect for all that ought to be respected. At the same time, Timothy was to be careful not to give by the laying on of hands his sanction to any one who did not offer moral guarantees that, in the position he had taken, he deserved this mark of respect from others. It would be, on Timothy's part, to become a partaker in the sins of which such a one might be guilty. He was not to lay hands hastily on any one.

Some men's sins were open, and proclaimed beforehand the judgment that awaited them. The sins of others were hidden: they would find them again at the great day. But this was a reason why he should do nothing in his charge with precipitation; he was also to keep himself pure.

Timothy's habitual temperance is here seen: weak in body, the apostle recommends him to use his liberty by taking a little wine — a pleasing instance of grace. We have here a proof of the habits of this faithful servant. The Spirit shows us how carefully he kept himself from exciting or satisfying his passions in the least thing (at the same time that there is perfect liberty to use everything that is good when there is a true reason for it), and also the apostle's tender interest in his fellow-laborer in the gospel. It is a little parenthesis attached to the expression, "be not a partaker of other men's sins," but it has great beauty. This affectionate watchfulness became the apostle; he desired holiness in his representative, but he well knew how to respect Timothy, and to maintain the decorum which he had enjoined, and to exhibit his heartfelt tenderness. The 24th verse is connected with the 22nd.

The apostle then goes equally into detail with regard to servants, that is, slaves. They were to respect their masters, in order that the doctrine of the Lord should not be blasphemed.

When the masters were believers, there was naturally more familiarity, for they were one in Christ, and thence the danger (for the flesh is crafty) that the servants might not treat their masters with the respect due to them. The apostle guards against this abuse of christian love, and of the just intimacy and confidence which ought to exist between brethren; but which,

on the contrary, was a motive for the servant to render all honor to his master, by treating him with more love and with the same respect.

It was necessary that the apostle should be firm. All other instructional refusal to receive the wholesome words of christian doctrine, the words of Christ and the doctrine which is according to practical godliness — proceeded from the flesh, from human pride in those who wished to take advantage of godliness, and make it a means of gain. From such persons Timothy was to turn away. Godliness was indeed gain, if they were contented with what they had; and the Christian, who does not belong to this world, if he has food and raiment, ought to be content therewith. He brought nothing into this world, and will certainly carry nothing out of it. And the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil. Seduced by this covetousness, some had wandered away from christian faith, and had pierced their hearts with sorrow. The desire to be rich was the path of snares and temptation, of foolish and hurtful lusts. Timothy was to flee these things, as a man of God. This is always the thought here: he was in the world on the part of God; he represented Him for his part in the work. He was therefore to follow after other things than earthly riches — the character of a man of God — righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness: these were the things which, in man, presented God to the world and glorified Him.

Meanwhile there was conflict: he must fight the good fight of faith. If anyone represents God in the world, there must be warfare, because the enemy is there. The energy of faith was also necessary, in order to lay hold of eternal life in the midst of the seduction and difficulties which the “things that are seen” presented. God, moreover, had called Timothy to this, and he had made a good confession before many witnesses.

Finally, the apostle charges him most solemnly in the presence of God, the Source of life for all things, and of Christ Jesus who had Himself born witness without wavering before the powers of this world, placing him under the responsibility of keeping the commandment without spot, unrebukable until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It will be noticed here that, as Paul had not spoken in the epistle of the privileges of the assembly, but of its responsibility, so neither does he here speak of its being caught up but of its manifestation, when the fruits of

faithfulness (or of failure in it) will be gathered, and every one be in his place in the visible glory according to his work. All are like Christ, all enter into His joy; but to sit at His right and left hand in His kingdom is the portion of those for whom it is prepared by His Father, who bestows it according to the work which He has granted each to perform, giving him power to accomplish it, although in grace He reckons it as our own.

Christ Himself is here viewed as the faithful man (v. 13), whom God will manifest in glory before all creatures at the time ordained in His counsels.

All here is responsibility before the world, or glory as the result of that responsibility. The supreme, invisible God is maintained in His majesty; and He presents the Lord Jesus Christ in the creation as its center, and repository of His glory — He who dwells in light inaccessible, whom, in His divine essence man has not seen and cannot see.

This character of the epistle is very remarkable. Nowhere else is the inaccessible majesty of God, as God, thus presented. His character is often the subject of instruction and manifestation. Here He alone has essential immortality. He dwells in inaccessible light. He is ever invisible to the eyes of men. He alone has power. He has dominion over all who reign. It is God in the abstraction of His essence, in the proper immutability of His being, in the rights of His majesty, veiled to all men.

Now Christ will be the center of the visible glory. Having part in the divine glory before the world was, He displays, in the human nature in which He took part, this glory, which is rendered visible in Him, causing His own to participate in His joy and in all that He has in this character; but here, He is manifested by God, and in order that all should acknowledge Him.\* And it is our responsibility, faithfulness to which will be manifested in that day, which is here set before us. However small may be our share of responsibility, it is of such a God as this that we are the representatives on earth. Such is the God before whom we are to walk, and whose majesty we are to respect immediately in our conduct, and also in our relations to all that He has made.

[\* In Revelation 19 He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Here He who is so manifests Him. So in Daniel 7. The Son of man is brought to the Ancient of days, but in the same chapter the Ancient of days comes.]

The apostle concludes his exhortation to Timothy by engaging him to warn the rich not to rest on the uncertainty of riches, but on the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy. It is still the supreme and Creator-God who is before our eyes. Moreover, they were to be rich in good works, and ready to give; to be rich in those dispositions which would be of value, which would lay up a store (this is but a figure) against the time to come; and to lay hold of that which really is life. The apostle repeats his urgent exhortation to Timothy to keep that which had been committed to him, to avoid profane and vain babblings, holding fast the sound and sanctifying truth, and to have nothing to do with oppositions of human science, which pretended to penetrate into divine things as though they were subject to its knowledge. This was the origin of the fall of many with regard to christian faith.

I do not doubt that, in the manner in which the apostle here sets God before us, he refers to the foolish imaginations to which, under the influence of the enemy, men were abandoning themselves. Thus he speaks of these with relation to the majesty of His Being as the one only God in whom is all fullness, and with regard to the sobriety of practical morality, which keeps the heart under the influence of that truth, and apart from the false and vain speculations in which the pride of man indulged itself. He maintained souls by the majesty of the only God, in the practical sobriety in which peace dwells.

Soon will the veil be drawn aside by the appearing of Jesus, whom the Almighty God will display to the world.



## 2 TIMOTHY

The second epistle to Timothy has a very peculiar character. It is the expression of his heart, who outside Palestine had, under God, founded and built the assembly of God on earth, and it was written in sight of its failure, and its departure from the principles on which he had established it. God remained faithful; His foundation was sure and immovable; but the work committed into the hands of men was already enfeebled and decaying. The consciousness of this state of things, which moreover betrayed itself in the way in which the apostle himself was then forsaken, oppressed his heart; and he pours it out into the bosom of his faithful Timothy. By this means the Spirit instructs us in the solemn truth, that the church has not kept its first estate, and sets before us the ways of safety for those who seek God, and desire to please Him, in such a state of things as this.

The apostle John gives the history of the fall of the assembly here below, and of its judgment, and that of the world likewise. He also sets before us a life which, apart from all questions of the assembly's condition, abides ever the same, which renders us capable of enjoying God, and makes us resemble Him in His nature and character.

As a witness John was to remain until the Lord came: but Paul sees for himself the ruin of that which he had built and watched over so faithfully. He had spent himself for the assembly, accomplishing that which was behind of the sufferings of Christ; and he had to see that which he had so much loved (which he had cared for even as a mother cherishes her nursling which he had planted as God's plant on the earth) grow feeble as to its condition and testimony in the world, depart from the source of strength, and become corrupt. What a painful experience! But it is that of the servant of God in all ages and in all dispensations. He sees indeed the power of God acting to plant the testimony on earth, but he sees that men soon fail in it. The house inhabited by the Holy Ghost becomes dilapidated and in disorder. Nevertheless (and we love to repeat it with the apostle) the sure foundation of the Lord abides for ever. Whatever may be the condition of the whole company, the individual is always to depart

from all iniquity, and to maintain, by himself if need be, the true testimony of the name of the Lord. This can never fail the faithful soul.

In view of the mixture and confusion which began to show itself in the assembly, the apostle's comfort was founded on these two principles, while remembering and joyfully availing himself of the communion and faithfulness of some precious souls. He had such as Timothy and Onesiphorus, amid the afflictions of the gospel and the sorrow of being forsaken by so many who were seals to his testimony before the Lord.

The apostle begins by taking the ground of grace and of individual life — which never changes in essential character — outside church privileges. Not that these had changed; but he could no longer connect them with the general body on earth. He calls himself here an apostle according to the promise of eternal life which is in Christ Jesus. It is not merely the Messiah, it is not the head of the body, it is the promise of life which is in Him.

Paul addresses his dearly beloved son Timothy, whose affection he remembers. He desired greatly to see him, being mindful of his tears, shed probably at the time when Paul was made prisoner, or when he was separated from him on that occasion, or when he heard of it. It is the confidence of a friend that is speaking to one whose heart he knew. We see something of this, but in the perfection that was peculiar to Himself, in Jesus on the cross, in that which He said to John and to His mother. A similar form would have been unsuitable in Paul. The affections of men show themselves in and by their wants, the wants of their hearts; those of the Lord by His condescension. With Him all is in itself perfect. With us it is only by grace that all is in its right place. But when separation to service in power, which knows but that, is over, nature according to God has its right place. In the consecrated meat-offering that was to be made with fire, honey had no place.

Verse 3. The apostle does not speak any longer of the high character of his work, but of his personal position rightly felt according to the Spirit. He had served God, following in the steps of his forefathers, with a pure conscience. In every way he was a vessel made unto honor. For more than one generation his ancestors were distinguished for a good conscience; and personal piety, founded on the truth, showed itself in the service of God.

Paul was not here expressing a judgment as to the inward condition of each generation: it was their character. He calls to mind a similar fact with regard to Timothy, in whose case however personal faith is referred to, known to Paul himself, so that the bond, though of personal feeling, was christian.\* Judaism, as to its outward obligations, is totally absent; for the father of Timothy was a Greek, and the marriage of his Jewish mother was unclean according to the law, and would have rendered Timothy also unclean and deprived him of Jewish rights; and in fact he had not been circumcised when an infant. Paul did it, which was also not according to the law, unless Timothy had become a proselyte. Both heathens and their children were excluded, as we read in Nehemiah. Paul's act was above the law. Here he takes no notice of it; he leaves the Gentile father out of sight, and speaks only of the personal unfeigned faith of Timothy's mother and grandmother, and that of his beloved disciple himself.

[\* It is indeed the basis of the exhortation of verse 6. When the faith of so many is giving way, he turns to the personal confidence which his heart had in Timothy, nourished up through grace by the atmosphere he had lived in.]

The state of the assembly was only an additional occasion for the exercise of his faith, and for his zealous activity of heart and courage. Difficulties and dangers multiplied on every hand; the unfaithfulness of Christians was added to all the rest. But God is none the less with His people. God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind, so that the Lord's laborer, the man of God, he who kept himself in communion with God in order to represent Him on the earth, was to stir up the gift that was in him, and (as the apostle expresses it with admirable and touching force and clearness) to endure the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God. Here, in the case of Timothy, the apostle could make mention of a special gift of the Spirit, which had been conferred upon Timothy, through the laying on of hands. In the first epistle he had spoken of the prophecy which had called him or pointed him out for the possession of this gift, and told us that it had been accompanied by the laying on of the hands of the elders; here he tells us that the laying on of his own hands was the means of bestowing it upon him.

The apostle reminds him of this proof of power and reality in his ministry (and in that of Paul himself), in view of this period when its exercise was

more difficult. When all is prosperous, and the progress of the gospel is remarkable, so that even the world is struck with it, the work is found to be easy, in spite of difficulties and opposition; and — such is man — even in consequence of this opposition one is bold and persevering. But when others, Christians even, forsake the laborer, when evil and the deceptions of the enemy come in, when love has grown cold, and, because one is faithful, prudence takes alarm, and desires a less forward walk, to stand firm in circumstances like these, to persevere in the work, and maintain one's courage, is not an easy thing. We must possess Christianity with God, so that we know why we stand fast: we must be ourselves in communion with Him, in order to have the strength necessary to continue laboring in His name, and the sustainment of His grace at all times.

God then has given us the Spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind; the apostle had received such a position from God, that he had been able to bestow on Timothy the gift needed for his service; but the state of spirit and soul which could use it was part of the inheritance of every Christian who leant really on God. Nor was he to be ashamed either of the testimony, which was losing outwardly its onward current in the world, nor of Paul who was now a prisoner. How precious to possess that which is eternal, that which is founded on the power and on the work of God Himself! There were indeed the afflictions of the gospel, but he should take part in them and not shrink, enduring according to the power of God. God has saved us, has called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, as though anything depended on man, but according to His own purpose and His grace given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. This is the sure and immovable foundation, a rock for our souls, against which the waves of difficulty break in vain, showing a strength which we could not resist for a moment, but showing also their total powerlessness against the purpose and work of God. The efforts of the enemy only prove that he is without strength, in the presence of that which God is, and of that which He has done for us. And the apostle identifies his ministry with this, and the sufferings he was undergoing. But he knew whom he had believed and his happiness was safe laid up with Him.

That which we have to seek is the power of the Spirit, in order that we may realise this gift of God by faith, and that we may abide, as to our hearts, as to our practical faith, in the sense of our union with Christ, upon

this immutable foundation, which is nothing less than the immutability and the glory of God Himself. For His purpose has been manifested; that purpose, which gave us a place and a portion in Christ Himself, was now manifested through the appearance of that very Christ.

It is no longer a nation chosen in the world to display in it the principles of the government of God, and of His ways in righteousness, in patience, in kindness, and in power, on the earth (however unchangeable His counsels, however sure His calling), as manifested in His dealings with regard to the people whom He called.

It is a counsel of God, formed and established in Christ before the world existed, which has its place in the ways of God, outside and above the world, in union with the Person of His Son, and in order to manifest a people united with Him in glory. Thus is it a grace which was given us in Him, before the world was. Hidden in the counsels of God, this purpose of God was manifested with the manifestation of Him in whom it had its accomplishment. It was not merely blessings and dealings with God with regard to men — it was life, eternal life in the soul, and incorruptibility in the body. Thus Paul was apostle according to the promise of life.

While Christ Himself was alive, although life was in Him, this purpose of God was not accomplished with respect to us. The power of life, divine power in life, was to manifest itself in the destruction of the power of death brought in by sin and in which Satan reigned over sinners. Christ then in His resurrection has annulled death, and by the gospel has brought to light both life and incorruptibility, that is to say, that condition of eternal life which puts the soul and the body beyond death and its power. Thus the glad tidings of this work were addressed to all men. Founded in the eternal counsels of God, established in the Person of Christ, the work necessary for its fulfillment being accomplished by Him, possessing a character altogether outside Judaism, and the mere government of God in the earth, Paul's gospel was unto all men. Being the manifestation of the eternal counsels and power of God, having to do with man as lying under the power of death, and with the accomplishment of a victory that placed man beyond that power, and in an entirely new condition which depended on the power of God and His purposes, it addressed itself to man, to all men, Jews or Gentiles without distinction. Knowing Adam dead by sin

and Christ alive in the power of divine life, he announced this good news to man — deliverance, and a totally new state of things.

It was to proclaim this gospel that the apostle had been called as a herald. It was for this he suffered, and, in the sense of what had caused it, was not ashamed to suffer. For he knew whom he had believed; he knew His power. He believed in the gospel that he preached, and therefore in the victorious power of Him in whom he believed. He could die with regard to the life that he had received from the first Adam, he could be dishonored and put to shame in the world and by the world: life in Christ, the power by which Christ had won a place for man outside the condition of the first Adam, life as Christ now possesses it was not touched thereby. Not that life had not been there before, but death and he that had the power of death were not overcome, and all was dark beyond the closing tomb: a lightning flash might pass across the gloom, adequate ground be laid for the just conclusion of the Pharisee, but life and incorruptibility were not brought to light but in Christ and His resurrection.

But this is not all which is here expressed. The apostle does not say “in what I have believed,” but “whom”: an important difference, which places us (as to our confidence) in connection with the Person of Christ Himself. The apostle had spoken of the truth, but truth is allied to the Person of Christ. He is the truth; and in Him truth has life, has power, is linked with the love which applies it, which maintains it in the heart and the heart by it. “I know,” says the apostle, “whom I have believed.” He had committed his happiness to Christ. In Him was that life in which the apostle participated; in Him, the power that sustained it, and that preserved in heaven the inheritance of glory which was his portion where this life was developed.

Encouraged by this hope, and committing himself to Jesus, he had endured all things for Him, and for those who were His; he had accepted all suffering here, he was ready to die daily. His happiness, in the glory of that new life, he had committed to Jesus; he labored meanwhile in affliction, sure of finding again, without being deceived, that which he had committed to the Lord, in the day when he should see Him and all his sorrows ended. It was in the expectation of that day, in order to find it again at that day, that he had committed to Him his happiness and his joy.

Moreover, his own career would soon be finished; his eyes therefore turn towards Timothy for the welfare of the assembly here below. He exhorts him to be steadfast, to hold fast the truth, as he had taught it to him (it was the testimony of the Lord), but the truth in its realisation by faith in Christ, and according to the power of love that is found in communion with Him. It is this which, as we have seen, the apostle had realised. The truth, and living grace in Jesus, in faith and in love, which gave it its power and its value — these are, as it were, the pivots of strength and faithfulness at all times, and especially for the man of God, when the assembly in general is unfaithful.

Truth as it was taught by the apostles and expressed by them, the manner in which they presented the truth, “the form of sound words,” is the inspired expression of that which God was pleased to reveal; and that, in all the relationships in which the truth is linked together, in all its different parts, according to the living nature and power of God, who is necessarily its center as He is its source. Nothing except revelation could be this expression. God expresses everything as it is, and in a living way; and by His word all exists. He is the source and the center of all things. All flow from Him — are in relation with a living Person, namely Himself, who is their source, from whom all hold their existence. This existence only subsists in connection with Him; and the relationship of all things to Him, and between themselves, is found in the expression of His mind — in that measure at least in which He puts Himself in relation with man in all these things. If evil comes in, as regards will or its consequences in judgment, it is because this relationship is broken; and the relationship that is broken is the measure of the evil.

Thus we see the immense importance of the word of God. It is the expression of the relationship of all things to God; whether as regards their existence — that is, creation — or with respect to His counsels; or even as to His own nature, and the relationship of man with Him, and the communication of life received from Him, and the maintenance of His true character. It comes from heaven as did the living Word, reveals what is there; but adapts itself, as the living Word did, to man here, directs him where there is faith here, but leads him up there where the living Word is gone as Man.

The more we consider the word, the more we shall see its importance. Analogously to Christ the living Word, it has its source on high, and reveals what is there, and is perfectly adapted to man down here, giving a perfect rule according to what is up there, and, if we are spiritual, leading us up there: our conversation is in heaven. We must distinguish between the relationship in which man stood as child of Adam, and as child of God. The law is the perfect expression of the requirements of the former, the rule of life to him; it is found to be to death. Once we are sons of God, the life of the Son of God as man down here becomes our rule of life. "Be ye imitators of God as dear children, and walk in love as Christ hath loved us."

In His nature, as the author of all existence, and the center of all authority and subsistence outside Himself, God is the center of all, and the upholder of all. As to His counsels, Christ is the center, and here man has a peculiar place; wisdom's good pleasure was eternally in Him, and all is to be under His feet. In order that the nature and the counsels of God should not be separated (which indeed is impossible, but what was in His counsels in order that it might not be), God became man. Christ is God made manifest in flesh, the Word made flesh. Thus the divine nature, the expression of that nature, is found in that which is the object of His counsels, that which forms their center. Thus Christ is the truth — is the center of all existing relationships: all have reference to Him. We are, through Him, for Him, or we are against Him; all subsist by Him. If we are judged, it is as His enemies. He is the life (spiritually) of all that enjoy the communication of the divine nature; even as He sustains all that exists. His manifestation brings to light the true position of all things. Thus He is the truth. All that He says, being the words of God, are spirit and life; quickening, acting according to grace, judging with regard to the responsibility of His creatures.

But there is yet more than this. He is the revelation of love. God is love, and in Jesus love is in action and is known by the heart that knows Him. The heart that knows Him lives in love, and knows love in God. But He is also the object in whom God is revealed to us, and has become the object of entire reliance. Faith is born by His manifestation. It existed indeed through partial revelation of this same object, by means of which God made Himself known; but these were only partial anticipations of that



which has been fully accomplished in the manifestation of Christ, of the Son of God. The object is the same: formerly, the subject of promise and prophecy; now, the personal revelation of all that God is, the image of the invisible God, the One in whom the Father also is known.

Thus faith and love have their birth, their source, in the object which by grace has created them in the soul: the object in which it has learnt what love is, and with regard to which faith is exercised. By Him we believe in God. No one has ever seen God: the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has revealed Him.

Truth is thus revealed, for Jesus is the truth, the expression of that which God is, so as to put all things perfectly in their place, in their true relationships with God and with each other. Faith and love find the occasion of their existence in the revelation of the Son of God, of God as a Savior in Christ.

But there is another aspect of the accomplishment of the work and of the counsels of God, which we have not yet spoken of: that is, the communication of the truth and of the knowledge of God. This is the work of the Holy Ghost, in which the truth and the life are united, for we are begotten by the word. It is divine energy in the Deity, acting in all that connects God with the creature or the creature with God. Acting in divine perfection as God, in union with the Father and the Son, the Holy Ghost reveals the counsels of which we have spoken, and makes them effectual in the heart, according to the purpose of the Father, and by the revelation of the Person and work of the Son. I have said, divine energy, not as a theological definition — which is not my object here — but as a practical truth, for, while attributing all that regards the creature to the Father (except judgment, which is entirely committed to the Son, because He is the Son of man) and to the Son, the immediate action in creation and on the creature, wherever it takes place, is attributed to the Spirit.

The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters when this earth was formed; by His Spirit the heavens were garnished; we are born of the Spirit; sealed with the Spirit; holy men of God spake by the Spirit; gifts were the operation of the Spirit distributing to whom He would; He bears witness with our spirits; He groans in us; we pray by the Holy Ghost, if that grace is bestowed upon us. The Lord Himself, born as man in this

world, was conceived by the Holy Ghost; by the Spirit of God He cast out devils. The Spirit bears witness of all things, that is to say, of all truth in the word: the love of the Father, the nature and the glory of God Himself, His character, the Person and glory and love of the Son, His work, form the substance of His testimony, with all that relates to man in connection with these truths. The Spirit's witness to these things is the word, and — produced by means of men — takes the shape of the truth formally set forth by revelation. Christ is the truth, as we have seen, the center of all the ways of God; but what we are now speaking of is the divine communication of this truth; and in this way it can be said that the word is the truth.\* But, although communicated by means of men, so that it takes a form adapted to man, its source is divine; and He who has communicated it is divine: He of whom it is said, "he shall not speak of himself" (that is to say, from Himself — apart from the Father and the Son). Consequently the revelation of the truth has all the depth, the universality of relationship, the inseparable connection with God (without which it would not be truth, for all that is separate from God is falsehood), which truth itself possesses — necessarily possesses — because it is the expression of the relationships which all things have to God in Christ; that is to say, of God's own thoughts, of which all these relationships are but the expression. It is true that this revelation also judges all that is not in accordance with these relationships, and judges according to the value of the relationship that is broken with regard to God Himself, and the place which this relationship has in His mind.\*\* When this word is received through the quickening work of the Holy Ghost in the heart, it is efficacious; there is faith, the soul is in real living practical relationship with God according to that which is expressed in the revelation it has received. The truth — which speaks of the love of God, of holiness, of cleansing from all sin, of eternal life, of the relationship of children — being received into the heart, places us in real present living relationship with God, according to the force of all these truths, as God conceives them and as He has revealed them to the soul. Thus they are vital and efficacious by the Holy Ghost; and the consciousness of this revelation of the truth, and of the truth of that which is revealed, and of really hearing the voice of God in His word, is faith.

[\* Hence also it is said (1 John 5), "The Spirit is truth."

[\*\* This is true as regards guilt. But God, being perfectly revealed, and that in grace as the Father and the Son, our apprehension of the ruin in which we are, goes deeper far than the sense of guilt as the breach of previously existing relationships. We were guilty according to our place as men. But we were without God in the world, and (when God is known) this is awful. The beginning of Romans treats the question of guilt; Ephesians 2, the state we were in; John 5:24 briefly resumes grace as to both. The relationship now is an entirely new one, founded on purpose, redemption, and our being children of God.]

But all this is true in the revealed word before I believe in it, and in order that I may believe in it — may believe in the truth — although the Holy Ghost alone makes us hear the voice of God in it, and so produces faith. And that which is revealed in it is the divine expression of that which belongs to the infinite on the one side, and is expressed in the finite on the other; of that which has the profoundness of the nature of God, from whom all proceeds, with whom and with whose rights all is in relationship, but which is developed — since it is outside God — in creation and in the finite.

The union of God and man in the Person of Christ is the center — we may say (now that we know it) the necessary center of all this, as we have seen. And the inspired word is its expression according to the perfection of God, and (we bless God for it, as the Savior is the grand subject of the scriptures, “for,” said He, “they testify of me”) in human forms.

But this word, being divine, being inspired, is the divine expression of the divine nature, persons, and counsels. Nothing that is not inspired in this way can have this place — for none but God can perfectly express or reveal what God is — hence infinite in what flows in it; because it is the expression of, and connected with, the depths of the divine nature, and so in its connection infinite, though expressed in a finite sense, and so far finite in expression, and thus adapted to finite man. Nothing else is the divine expression of the divine mind and truth, or is in direct union with the unmixed source, even though it sprang from the same source. The immediate connection is broken; that which is said is no longer divine. It may contain many truths, but the living derivation, the infinite, the union with God, the immediate and uninterrupted derivation from God, are wanting. The infinite is no longer there. The tree grows from its root, and forms one whole; the energy of life pervades it — the sap which flows from the root. We may consider one part, as God has set it there, as a part

of the tree; we may see the importance of the trunk; the beauty of the development in its smallest details, the stateliness of the whole, in which the vital energy combines liberty and harmony of form. We see that it is a whole, united in one by the same life that produced it. The leaves, the flowers, the fruit, all tell us of the warmth of that divine Sun which developed them, of the gushing inexhaustible stream which nourishes them. But we cannot separate one part, be it ever so beautiful, from the tree, without depriving it of the energy of life and its relationship with the whole.

When the power of the Spirit of God produces the truth, it develops itself in union with its source, whether in revelation or even in the life and in the service of the individual; although in the two latter cases there is a mixture of other elements, owing to the weakness of the man. When a man's mind apprehends the truth, and he seeks to give it a form, he does it according to the capacity of man, which is not its source; the truth as he expresses it, even were it pure, is separated in him from its source and its totality; but, besides this, the shape that a man gives it always bears the stamp of the man's weakness. He has only apprehended it partially, and he only produces a part of it. Accordingly it is no longer the truth. Moreover, when he separates it from the whole circle of truth in which God has placed it, he must necessarily clothe it in a new form, in a garment which proceeds from man: at once error mixes with it. Thus it is no longer a vital part of the whole, it is partial, and thereby not the truth; and it is in fact mixed with error. That is theology.

In the truth there is, when God expresses it, love, holiness, authority, as they are in Him the expression of His own relationships with man, and of the glory of His being. When man gives it a shape, all this is wanting and cannot be in it, because it is man who shapes it. It is no longer God speaking. God gives it a perfect form; that is to say, He expresses the truth in words of certainty. If man gives it a form, it is no longer the truth given of God. Therefore to hold fast the truth in the form God has given it, the type, the shape in which He has expressed it, is of all importance: we are in relationship with God in it according to the certainty of that which He has revealed. This is the sure resource of the soul, when the assembly has lost its power and its energy, and is no longer a sustainment to feeble

souls; and that which bears its name no longer answers to the character given it, in the first epistle, “the pillar and support of the truth.”\*

[\* The doctrines or dogmas of scripture have their importance and their adaptation to the simplest soul in this, that they are facts, and so objects of faith, not notions. Thus Christ is God, Christ is man, the Holy Ghost is a Person, and the like, are facts for faith, realised in the simplest soul.]

The truth, clear and positive truth, given as a revelation from God in the words — clothed with His authority — by which He has given the truth a form, communicating the facts and the divine thoughts which are necessary for the salvation of men, and for their participation in divine life — this it is which we are to hold fast.

We are only sure of the truth when we retain the very language of God which contains it. By grace I may speak of the truth in all liberty, I may seek to explain it, to communicate it, to urge it on the conscience, according to the measure of light and spiritual power bestowed upon me; I may endeavor to demonstrate its beauty, and the connection between its various parts. Every Christian, and especially those who have a gift from God for the purpose, may do this. But the truth which I explain and propose is the truth as God has given it, and in His own words in the revelation He has made. I hold fast the form of sound words, which I have received from a divine source and authority: it gives me certainty in the truth.

And here it is important to remark the assembly’s part when faithful. She receives, she maintains the truth in her own faith; she guards it, she is faithful to it, she is subject to it, as a truth, a revelation, which comes from God Himself. She is not the source of the truth. As an assembly she does not propagate it — does not teach it. She says “I believe,” not “Believe.” This last is the function of ministry, in which man is always individually in relationship with God by means of a gift which he holds from God, and for the exercise of which he is responsible to God. This is all-important. Those who possess these gifts are members of the body. The assembly exercises her discipline with regard to all that is of the flesh in them, in the exercise or apparent exercise of a gift, as in all else. She preserves her own purity without respect of persons as to their outward appearance, being guided therein by the word (for this is her responsibility); but she does not teach, she does not preach.

The word goes before the assembly, for she has been gathered together by the word. The apostles, a Paul, those who were scattered abroad by the persecution, a thousand faithful souls, have proclaimed the word, and thus the assembly has been gathered out. It has been said that the assembly was before the scriptures. As regards the written contents of the New Testament, this is true; but the preached word was before the assembly. The assembly is its fruit, but is never its source. The edification even of the assembly, when it has been gathered together, comes direct from God, through the gifts which He has bestowed; the Holy Ghost distributing to each according to His will.

The scriptures are the means which God has used to preserve the truth, to give us certainty in it; seeing the fallibility of the instruments by whom it is propagated, since revelation has ceased.

If at the beginning He filled certain persons with His Spirit in such a way that error was excluded from their preaching, if besides this He then gave revelations in which there was nothing but His own word, yet as a general rule preaching is the fruit of the Holy Ghost in the heart, and its spirituality is only in measure, and there is the possibility of error. Here, whatever may be the power of the Spirit's work, we have to judge (see Acts 17:11:1 Corinthians 14:29). Farther on we shall see that in forming this judgment, it is the scriptures which assure those who are led of God.

We have thus in the ways of God respecting this subject three things closely united, yet different; ministry, the assembly, and the word of God, that is, the written word; when it is not written, it belongs to the order of ministry.

Ministry — as regards the word, for this is not the only service — preaches to the world, and teaches or exhorts the members of the assembly.

The assembly enjoys communion with God, is fed, and grows by means of that with which its different members supply it. It preserves, and, in its confession, bears witness to the truth. It maintains holiness, and, by the grace and presence of the Holy Ghost, enjoys mutual communion; and, in love, cares for the temporal need of all its members.

The written word is the rule which God has given, containing all that He has revealed. It is complete (Colossians 1:25). It can, because it is the truth, be the means of communicating the truth to a soul: the Holy Ghost can use it as a means; but at all events it is the perfect rule, the authoritative communication of the will and the mind of God, for the assembly.

The assembly is subject, is to be faithful, to have no will. It does not reveal, it maintains by its confession, it watches over that which it has, it does not communicate; it has received and is faithfully to keep. The man directs, that is, Christ: the woman obeys, and is faithful to her husband's thoughts — at least ought to be so (1 Corinthians 11): this is the assembly. The oracles of God are committed to her. She does not give them; she obeys them.

The minister is bound individually to the same faithfulness. This we understand; and in our epistle we have especially to do with this individual responsibility. That which the assembly is in this respect is revealed in the first epistle (chap. 3:15). Here it is the individual who is to hold fast this form of sound words which he has received from a divine source, for such the apostle was, in his apostolic function, as an instrument. Neither Timothy nor the assembly could frame such a form of sound words; their part was to hold it fast, having received it.

And here, as we have said, however unfaithful the assembly may be, the individual is bound to be faithful and always to be so.

This therefore is what we have to do: the truth which is set before us in the inspired word we are (and I am) to hold fast, in the form in which it is presented to us. I am to hold it fast, not merely as a proposition, but in union with the Head, in faith and love, which are in Christ Jesus. Strength to fulfill comes from above. For here another point is brought before us. The Holy Ghost has been given indeed to the assembly; but a period of unfaithfulness is here contemplated (v. 15). He has been given to the man of God, to each Christian, and to each servant with reference to the service appointed him. By the Holy Ghost we are to keep the good thing that has been committed to us. In days like those, this was the duty of the man of God; and in our day, things have gone much farther. Possessing the promise of life, and forsaken by the mass of Christians, he is to hold fast

the truth in the words in which it has been expressed by divine authority (this is what we have in the word, and not merely doctrine: people may say that they have the doctrine of Peter and Paul, but they cannot say that they have their words, the form of the truth as Paul and Peter gave it, elsewhere than in their writings); and he is to hold it fast in faith and love, which are in Christ. Moreover he is to keep, by the power of the Holy Ghost, the substance of the truth, that which has been given us as a treasure — the deposit of divine truth and riches, which has been given us as our portion here below.

In verses 15-18 we find that the mass had quite turned away from the apostle, so that the affection and faithfulness of one became very precious to him. What a change already since the beginning of the gospel! Compare the Thessalonians, the Ephesians: they were the same people (for Ephesus was the capital of what is here called Asia) among whom Paul had preached, so that all Asia had heard the gospel; and see how they had all now forsaken him!

We must not however suppose that they had all abandoned the profession of Christianity; but their faith had become weak, and they did not like to identify themselves with a man who was in disgrace with the authorities, who was despised and persecuted, a prisoner — a man whose energy brought reproach and personal difficulties upon himself. They withdrew from him, and left him to answer alone for himself. Sad result of spiritual decline! But what sentiments should animate the man of God at such a moment? He must be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Christ was not changed, whatever the case might be with men; and he who suffered from their desertion could, without being discouraged, exhort his beloved Timothy to persevere steadily in the word. Nor do we find anywhere the man of God called to more full and unhesitating courage than in this epistle, which is the testimony of the failure and ruin of the assembly.

The truth was the especial treasure committed to him; and he was not only to keep it, as we have seen, but to take care that it was propagated and communicated to others after him, and perhaps still farther. That which he had heard from Paul in the presence of many witnesses (who could confirm Timothy in his convictions respecting the truth, and certify others that it was indeed what he had received from Paul) he was to communicate



to faithful men, who were capable of teaching others. This was the ordinary means. It is not the Spirit in the assembly, so that the assembly was an authority, it is no longer revelation. Timothy, well instructed in the doctrine preached by the apostle, and confirmed in his views by many other witnesses who had likewise learned of Paul, so that it was common to all as known received truth, was to take care that it should be communicated to other faithful men. Neither had this anything to do with giving them authority, with consecrating them, as has been said. It is the communication to them of the truth which he had received from Paul.

This procedure shuts out the idea of the assembly as the propagator of the truth. It was the business of the faithful son in the faith of the apostle, of the ministry.

Timothy himself was not an authority either. He was an instrument for the communication of the truth, and was to enable others to be so likewise: a very different thing from being the rule of the truth. That which he had heard — and the other witnesses served as a guarantee against the introduction of anything false, or even of his own opinions, if he had been inclined to entertain them — that he was to communicate.

It is thus that, in the ordinary sense, ministry is continued; care is taken by competent persons for the communication, not of authority, but of the truth, to other faithful persons. God can raise up any one whom He chooses, and give him the energy of His Spirit; and where this is found, there is power and an effectual work: but the passage we are considering supposes the careful communication of the truth to persons fit for this work. Both principles equally shut out the idea of the communication of official authority, and the idea of the assembly being either an authority with regard to the faith or the propagator of the truth. If God raised up whom He pleased, in whatever way He pleased, the means which He employed (when there was no special operation on His part) was to cause the truth to be communicated to individuals capable of propagating it. This is a widely different thing from bestowing authority, or the exclusive or official right to preach. And it was known revealed truth he was to communicate, that had the direct authority of revelation — what Paul's writings can alone furnish us now, or of course other inspired writings.

The apostle goes on to show the qualities that Timothy ought to possess, in order to carry on the work amid the circumstances that surrounded him, and in which the assembly itself was found. He must know how to endure hardships, vexations, difficulties, sorrows, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; he must beware of entangling himself with the affairs of life. A soldier, when in service, could not do so, but must be free from every hindrance, that he may please the one who had called him to arms. So also, as in the lists, he must fight according to rule, according to that which became the Lord's servant and was conformable to the Lord's will. And he must labor first, that he may have a right to enjoy the fruit of his labor. These are the practical conditions of divine service for whosoever engages in it. He must endure, be unentangled in the world, fight lawfully, and labor on first\* before he looked for fruits.

[\* Read "The husbandman must labor before partaking." 2 Timothy 2:6.]

The apostle returns to the elementary but fundamental principles of the truth, and to the sufferings of ministry, which moreover were in nowise a hindrance to the operations of the Spirit of God in extending the sphere in which the truth was propagated, and the word of God made known. Nothing could restrain the power of that instrument of the work of God.

The truth of the gospel (dogma is not the subject here) was divided into two parts, of which the apostle speaks also in the epistle to the Romans: the fulfillment of the promises; and the power of God in resurrection. "Jesus Christ, of the seed of David; raised from the dead." These, in fact, are, as it were, the two pivots of the truth. God faithful to His promises (shewn especially in connection with the Jews); and God mighty to produce an entirely new thing by His creative and quickening power, as manifested in the resurrection, which also put the seal of God upon the Person and the work of Christ.

The afflictions found in the path of service in the gospel assume here a high and peculiar character in the mind of the suffering and blessed apostle. It is participation in the sufferings of Christ, and, in the case of Paul, to a very remarkable degree. The expressions he uses are such as might be employed in speaking of Christ Himself as regards His love. As to the propitiation, naturally no other could take part in that: but in devotedness, and in suffering for love and for righteousness, we have the privilege of

suffering with Him. And here what part had the apostle with these sufferings? “I endure,” He says, “all things for the elect’s sakes.” This is truly what the Lord did. The apostle trod closely on His footsteps, and with the same purpose of love — ”that they might obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.” Here of course the apostle has to add, “which is in Christ Jesus”; still, the language is marvelous in the lips of any other person than the Lord Himself. For it is what Christ did.

Observe also here, that the greater the sufferings are (how small are ours on this account!) as the fruits of this love for the objects of the counsels of God, the greater is our privilege, the more do we participate in that which was the glory of Christ here below.

This thought sustains the soul in affliction of this kind: one has the same object as the Lord Himself. The energy of love in preaching the gospel addresses itself to the whole world. Perseverance, in the midst of affliction and difficulties and desertion, is sustained by the feeling that one is laboring for the accomplishment of God’s counsels. One endures all things for the elect, for God’s elect, in order that they may have salvation and eternal glory. This feeling was in Paul’s heart. He knew the love of God, and he sought — at the cost of whatever suffering it might be in the tumultuous sea of this world — that they who were the objects of the same love should enjoy the salvation and the glory which God bestowed. This was a faithful saying, that is, that which he had just declared; for if we should die with Christ, we should also live with Him; if we should suffer, we should also reign with Him. If any denied Him, He would also deny them; the consequences of such an act remained in all their force, they were linked with the immutability of His nature and His being, and were displayed in the authority of His judgment; He could not deny Himself because others were unfaithful.

Timothy was strengthened to maintain these great principles, which belonged to the moral nature of the Lord, and not allow himself to be drawn aside by speculations which only subverted souls and corrupted the faith. He was to show himself a workman approved of God, one who, being filled with the truth, and knowing how to unfold it in its various parts, according to the mind and purpose of God, would not be ashamed of

his work in the presence of those who might judge it. The profane and useless thoughts of human speculation he was to avoid. They could not but go on to produce ungodliness. They might have a great show of depth and height (as in the case of the assertion, that the resurrection had already taken place, which in a fleshly way went beyond all bounds with regard to our position in Christ) these doctrines which eat like a canker. Those of whom the apostle spoke had already overthrown the faith of some, that is, their conviction as to the truth and profession of the truth. But here the soul of the apostle found its refuge in that which is immutable, be the failure of the assembly or man's unfaithfulness ever so great. The sure foundation of God remained. It had this seal: the Lord knew them that were His. This was God's side, which nothing could touch.\* The other was man's: he who professed the name of the Lord was to depart from all iniquity. This was man's responsibility, but it characterised the work and fruit of grace wherever that work was genuine and the true fruit born.

[\* This, while a profound source of comfort, is a proof of decline; for men ought to know who are the Lord's too. It is not, "The Lord added daily to the assembly such as should be saved."

But here we have distinct evidence of the state of things which this epistle contemplates: namely, that the outward assembly had taken quite a new character, very different from that which it had at the beginning; and that now the individual was thrown upon his personal faithfulness as a resource, and as a means of escape from the general corruption. The sure foundation of God remained — His divine knowledge of those that are His; and individual separation from all evil; but the outward assembly assumes, in the eyes of the apostle, the character of a great house. All kinds of things are found in it, vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor, precious and vile. The man of God was to purge himself from the latter, to stand apart and not defile himself with that which was false and corrupt. This is a principle of all-importance, which the Lord has given us in His word. He allowed the evil to display itself in apostolic times, so far as to give occasion for the establishment of this principle by revelation, as that which was to govern the Christian. The unity of the assembly is so precious, it has such authority over the heart of man, that there was danger, when failure had set in, lest the desire for outward unity should induce even the faithful to accept evil and walk in fellowship with it, rather than break this unity. The principle therefore of individual faithfulness, of

individual responsibility to God is established, and set above all other considerations; for it has to do with the nature of God Himself, and His own authority over the conscience of the individual. God knoweth them that are His: Here is the ground of confidence. I do not say who are. And let those that name the name of Jesus separate themselves from all evil. Here I get what I can recognise. To maintain in practice the possibility of union between that name and evil is to blaspheme it.

The whole of that which calls itself christian is looked at here as a great house. The Christian is of it outwardly, in spite of himself; for he calls himself a Christian, and the great house is all that calls itself christian. But he cleanses himself personally from every vessel which is not to the Lord's honor. This is the rule of christian faithfulness; and thus personally cleansed from fellowship with evil, he shall be a vessel unto honor fit for the Master's use. Whatsoever is contrary to the honor of Christ, in those who bear His name, is that from which he is to separate himself.

Discipline for individual faults is not the subject here, nor the restoration of souls in an assembly that has in part lost its spirituality; but a line of conduct for the individual Christian in respect of that which dishonors the Lord in any way.

These instructions are solemn and important. That which makes them needful is sorrowful in its nature; but it all helps to exhibit the faithfulness and grace of God. The direction is plain, and precious when we find ourselves in similar circumstances. Individual responsibility can never cease.

When the Holy Ghost acts energetically and triumphs over the power of the enemy, these individuals who are gathered together in the assembly develop their life in it according to God and His presence, and the spiritual power which exists in the whole body acts upon the conscience, if needed, and guides the heart of the believer: so that the individual and the assembly flow on together under the same influence. The Holy Ghost, who is present in the assembly, sustains the individual at the height of God's own presence. Strangers even are obliged to confess that God is there. Love and holiness reign. When the effect of this power is no longer found in the assembly, and by degrees Christendom no longer answers to the character of the assembly as God formed it, yet the responsibility of the individual

to God has not ceased on that account. It can never either cease or diminish, for the authority and the rights of God Himself over the soul are at stake.

But in a case like this, that which calls itself Christian is no longer a guide, and the individual is bound to conform himself to the will of God, by the power of the Spirit, according to the light he has from it.

God may gather the faithful together. It is grace on His part; it is also His mind. But individual responsibility remains — responsibility not to break the unity, feeble as it may be, wherever it is possible according to God: but responsibility to preserve the divine character of Christianity in our walk, and to respond to the revelation we have received of His nature and of His will.

By purging himself from all those who are unto dishonor, the servant of God shall be unto honor, sanctified and prepared for every good work. For this separation from evil is not merely negative; it is the effect of the realisation of the word of God in the heart. I then understand what the holiness of God is, His rights over my heart, the incompatibility of His nature with evil. I feel that I dwell in Him and He in me; that Christ must be honored at all costs; that that which is like Him alone honors Him; that His nature and His rights over me are the only rule of my life. That which thus separates me unto Him, and according to what He is, separates me thereby from evil. One cannot walk with those who dishonor Him, and at the same time, honor Him in one's own walk.

That which follows shows the sanctifying character of this exhortation. The apostle says, "Flee also youthful lusts; but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart." This is to breathe the pure atmosphere which is found in the Lord's presence; in which the soul enjoys health and strength. All that corrupts is far away. And, further, we find, what is so often contested, that we can and are to distinguish those who call on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart. We do not decide who are the Lord's: He knows them. But we are to associate ourselves with those who manifest themselves, such as call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Those I am to know, own, and walk with. The statement that I cannot know who these are, is in defiance of an

express rule of scripture, applicable to a state where, through corruption, many who may possess Christianity are not so manifested.

As we find throughout these epistles, the apostle exhorts to avoid vain questions, in which there is no divine instruction. They only produce barren discussions and strife; and the servant of the Lord is not to strive. He comes, on God's part, to bring the truth in peace and love. He is to maintain this character in the expectation that God, in His grace, will give repentance to those who oppose (for it is the heart and conscience that are in question), that they may acknowledge the truth.

The truth of God is not a thing of human understanding; it is the revelation of that which God is, and of His counsels. Now we cannot have to do with God without the heart and conscience being engaged. It is not the revelation to us of God, if this is not the case. Christians are brought into connection with the divine Being Himself, and in acts which ought to have the most powerful effect on the heart and conscience; if they do not, both the one and the other are in a bad state and hardened. The Spirit of God, no doubt, acts on the understanding and by it; but the truth lodged in it is addressed to the conscience and to the heart, and if these are not reached by the truth, nothing is done. Nor indeed is anything really understood till they are. For in divine truth things are understood before words, as "born again" (compare John 8:43). On the other hand, by means of error, by occupying the mind with the error, Satan shuts God out of it, and leads the whole man captive, so that he does the will of that enemy to the soul.

Now this evil influence would too surely be exercised. The power of the holy truth of God would be lost in the assembly and among Christians; and those who bore this name would become (under the influence of the enemy) the expression of the will and passions of man, while still maintaining the forms of godliness; a peculiar condition, which betrays in a remarkable way the influence and the work of the enemy. This was to be expected; and they would be perilous days.

The open opposition of the enemy is doubtless a painful thing, but he deceives souls by the specious appearances of which the apostle here speaks — that which bears the name of Christianity, that which before men has the character of godliness, and which the flesh will accept as such much more readily than that which, because it is true godliness, is contrary

to the flesh. Nevertheless all the worst features of the human heart are linked with the name of Christianity. What then does the testimony become? It is, so to speak, an individual prophecy, clothed in sackcloth.

There is activity in this perilous evil of the last days: these deceivers would creep into houses, and gain the ear of feeble souls, who, governed by their passions, are ever learning yet never learn. Teachers like these resist the truth, they are men of corrupt minds, reprobate as to the faith; but they shall proceed no farther. God will make manifest their folly and their falseness by means even of their own pretensions, which they can no longer maintain.

The man of God is to turn away from such men, while they are yet deceiving and exercising their influence. God will expose them in due time. All will then judge them, and condemn their pretensions; the spiritual man does so while they are deceiving the others in security.

We may remark here that which evidences the sad and dangerous character of the days of which the apostle is speaking. If we compare the lists of sins and abominations, which Paul gives at the beginning of the epistle to the Romans, as characterising heathen life and the moral degradation of men during those times of darkness and demon-worship, with the catalogue of sins that characterise those who have the form of godliness, we shall find that it is nearly the same, and morally quite the same; only that some of the open sins which mark the man who has no outward restraint are wanting here, the form of godliness precluding them and taking their place.

It is a solemn thought, that the same degradation which existed among heathens is reproduced under Christianity, covering itself with that name, and even assuming the form of godliness. But in fact it is the same nature, the same passions, the same power of the enemy, with but the addition of hypocrisy. It is only the departure from, and corruption of, the true doctrine of the Mediator; as Paganism was that of the true doctrine of the only God.

Different directions are given for the conduct of the man of God, with regard to the vessels unto dishonor, and the men who act in the spirit of the last days. From the former he is to purge himself: he is to think of faithfulness in his own walk; and by cleansing himself from those vessels



which do not honor the name of Christ, which (although in the great house) do not bear the stamp of a pure desire for His glory, he shall be a vessel unto honor, fit for the Master's use. By keeping apart from such vessels, he is sheltered from the influences that impoverish and degrade the testimony he has to render to Christ, he is pure from that which deteriorates and falsifies that testimony.

In the other case — that of the men who gave the character of “perilous” to the last days, the corrupt opposers of the truth, bearing the name of godliness — with regard to these his testimony is to be distinct and plain. Here he is not merely to cleanse himself; he testifies his moral abhorrence, his loathing, of those who, being the instruments of the enemy, bear this character of formal piety. He turns away from them, and leaves them to the judgment of God.

Timothy had the walk and spirit of the apostle for his pattern. He had been much with him; he had seen, in times of trial, his patience and his sufferings, the persecutions he had endured; but the Lord had delivered him out of all. It would be the same with all who sought to live according to godliness, which is in Christ Jesus:\* they should endure persecution. Evil men and seducers would wax worse and worse, deceiving others, and being, at the same time, deceived themselves.

[\* We get the difference of the state of things in this case also. It is not all Christians who will be persecuted, but all who will live godly in Christ Jesus.]

The character of the last days is strongly marked here, and gives no hope for Christianity as a whole. The progress of evil is described as developing itself in two distinct characters, to which we have already alluded. The great house — Christendom as a whole — in which there are vessels to dishonor, from which we are to purge ourselves, and the positive activity of corruption, and of the instruments who propagate it and resist the truth, although they who corrupt themselves assume the form of godliness. Under this last aspect the wicked will go on growing worse and worse; nevertheless the hand of God in power will demonstrate their folly.

We may distinguish, in this second category, the general character of pride and corruptness in all who submit to this malignant influence, and those who themselves labor to extend it. Of the latter of this class, the apostle

says, are they who creep into houses. The character is that of the mass who are seduced; but there are seducers. These resist the truth, and their folly shall be manifested. It may be that God may demonstrate it, wherever there is faithfulness, in order to save His own from it; but, in general, their evil work will go on, and the seduction grow worse and worse, until the end, when God will make manifest the folly of those who have departed from Him, and given themselves up to the errors of the human mind, and labored to maintain and propagate them.

The apostle then tells Timothy of the safeguard on which he may rely to preserve himself, through grace, steadfast in the truth, and in the enjoyment of the salvation of God. Security rests upon the certainty of the immediate origin of the doctrine which he had received; and upon the scriptures received, as authentic and inspired documents, which announced the will, the acts, the counsels, and even the nature of God. We abide in that which we have learnt, because we know from whom we have learnt it. The principle is simple and very important. We advance in divine knowledge, but (so far as we are taught of God) we never give up, for new opinions, that which we have learnt from an immediately divine source, knowing that it is so. By a source immediately divine, I mean, a person to whom God Himself has communicated the truth by revelation with authority to promulgate it. In this case I receive what he says (when I know him to be such) as a divine communication. It is true that the scriptures always remain as a counter proof, but when — as in the case of the apostles — a man is proved to be the minister of God, gifted by Him for the purpose of communicating His mind, I receive what he says in the exercise of his ministry as coming from God. It is not the assembly that is in view in this case. It cannot be the vessel of divine truth directly communicated to it from God. Individuals are always that. We have seen that its part is to confess the truth when communicated, not to communicate it. But we here speak of a person to whom and by whom God immediately reveals the truth — such as the apostles and prophets. God has communicated to them, as elect vessels for this purpose, that which He desired to communicate to the world, and they have so communicated. None could do it who had not received it himself from God as a revelation: if this is not the case, the man himself has some part in it. I could not then say, “I know

of whom I have learnt it,” as knowing that it came immediately from God and by divine revelation.

When God had something to communicate to the assembly itself, He did it by means of such persons as Paul, Peter, etc. The assembly is composed of individuals; it cannot receive a divine revelation in a mass, as the assembly, except it be by hearing in common a divine voice, which is not God’s way. The Holy Ghost distributes to every one, severally as He will. There are prophets, and the Spirit says, “Separate unto me Barnabas and Paul.” Christ has given gifts to men, some apostles, some prophets, etc. Accordingly the apostle says here, not “where,” but “of whom” thou hast learnt these things.

Here, then, is the first foundation of certainty, strength, and assurance for the man of God with regard to divine truth. It has not been revealed to him immediately. It was Paul and other instruments, whom God chose for this special favor. But he knows of whom he has learnt it; even of one (here it was Paul) to whom it had been directly made known by inspiration, and who has authority from God to impart; so that they who learn of him know that it is divine truth, exactly as God communicated it (compare 1 Corinthians 2), and in the form in which He was pleased to communicate it.

There is another means, which has a character of its own; the scriptures, which are as such the foundation of faith to the man of God, and which direct him in all his ways. The Lord Jesus Himself said (speaking of Moses), “If ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” His words were the words of God; He does not contrast the authority of what He said with that of the written word, but the means of communication. God has been pleased to employ that means as a permanent authority. Peter says “No prophecy of scripture....” There have been many prophecies which are not written; they had the authority of God for those persons to whom they were addressed. For the word speaks more than once of prophets — who must therefore have prophesied — without communicating their prophecies to us. They were instruments for making known the will of God, at the moment, in order to guide His people in their actual circumstances, without its being a revelation necessary to the people of God at all times, or applicable either

to the world, to Israel, or to the assembly in all ages. It was not a general and permanent revelation from God for the instruction of the soul at all periods.

A multitude of things, spoken by Jesus Himself, are not reproduced in the scriptures; so that it is not only a question of from whom we have heard a truth, but also of the character of that which has been communicated. When it is for the permanent profit of the people or the assembly of God, God caused it to be written in the scriptures, and it abides for the instruction and the food of His children in all ages.

The expression, “knowing of whom thou hast learned them,” establishes us on personal apostolic authority, viewing the apostles as teachers authorised by the Lord. John says, “They who are of God hear us.” It is not necessary that scripture should be written by apostles; God has made known therein His will and the truth, and has committed the sacred deposit to His people for the profit of all ages. The scriptures have authority as such. And it is not that which, as a spiritual man, one may receive from them, that by which we have profited (as to application to one’s soul that is indeed all); but it is the entire holy scripture, such as we possess it, which has this authority.

From his childhood Timothy had read the holy scriptures; and these writings, such as he had read them as a child, guarded him — as divine authority — against error, and furnished him with the divine truths needful for his instruction. To use them aright, faith in Christ was requisite: but that which he used was the scripture known from his youth. The important thing to observe here is that the apostle is speaking of the scriptures, as they are in themselves, such as a child reads them; not even of that which a converted or spiritual man finds in them, but simply the holy writings themselves.

It may perhaps be said, that Timothy as a child possessed only the Old Testament. Agreed: but what we have here is the character of all that has a right to be called holy scripture. As Peter says as to the writings of Paul, these, “They wrest; as they do also **THE OTHER SCRIPTURES**.\* From the moment that we acknowledge the New Testament as having a title to that name, its writings possess the same character and have the same authority as the Old Testament.

[\* This too is the real sense of Romans 16:26, where we should read “by prophetic writings.”

The scriptures are the permanent expression of the mind and will of God furnished as such with His authority. They are His expression of His own thoughts. They edify, they are profitable: but this is not all — they are inspired. It is not only that the truth is given in them by inspiration. It is not this which is here stated. They are inspired.

The greater part of the New Testament is comprised in the first source of authority, “knowing of whom thou hast learnt them,” namely, all that which the apostles have written; because, in learning the truth therein, I can say I know from whom I have learnt it — I have learnt it from Paul, or from John, or from Peter, etc. But, besides this, being received as scriptures, they have the authority of divine writings, to which, as a form of communication, God has given the preference above the spoken word. They are the permanent rule by which every spoken word is to be judged.

In a word the scriptures are inspired. They teach, they judge the heart, they correct, they discipline according to righteousness, in order that the man of God may be perfect, that is, thoroughly instructed in the will of God, his mind formed after that will and completely furnished for every good work. The power for performing these comes from the actings of the Spirit. Safeguard from error, wisdom unto salvation, flow from the scriptures; they are capable of supplying them. We are to abide in that which we have learnt from the apostles, and to be governed by the writings of God.

Does this perfect and supreme authority of the scriptures set aside ministry? By no means; it is the foundation of the ministry of the word. One is a minister of the word; one proclaims the word — resting on the written word — which is authority for all, and the warrant for all that a minister says, and imparting to his words the authority of God over the conscience of those whom he teaches or exhorts. There is, in addition to this, the activity of love in the heart of him who exercises this ministry (if it be real), and the powerful action of the Spirit, if he be filled with the Holy Ghost. But that which the word says silences all opposition in the heart or mind of the believer.

It was thus that the Lord answered Satan, and Satan himself was reduced to silence.

He who does not submit to the words of God thereby shows himself to be a rebel against God. The rule given of God is in the scriptures; the energetic action of His Spirit is in ministry, although God can equally act upon the heart immediately by the word itself. Nevertheless ministry, since the revelations of God were completed, could not be an authority, or there would be two authorities; and if two, one must be a needless repetition of the other, or else, if they differed, no authority at all.

If the revelations were not complete, no doubt there might be more. The Old Testament left untold the history of Christ, the mission of the Holy Ghost, the formation of the assembly; because these facts not being yet accomplished could not be the subject of its historical and doctrinal instructions, and the assembly was not even the subject of prophecy. But all is now complete, as Paul tells us that he was a minister of the assembly to complete the word of God (Colossians 1:25). The subjects of revelation were then completed.

Observe, that the apostle insists, as a matter of responsibility, that Timothy should devote himself to his ministry with so much the more energy that the assembly was declining, and self-will in Christians was gaining the ascendancy; not that he throws any doubt upon its being a constant duty to do so at all times, whether happy or unhappy. The apostle, as we have seen, has two different periods in view; the decline of the assembly, which had already begun, and the still worse condition that was yet future. The special application of the exhortation here is to the first period, "Be instant," he says, "in season, out of season... for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine... and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

In how positive and distinct a way the apostle sets the fall of the assembly before us! Its impaired condition in his day was to him but a point of progress (according to his judgment in the Spirit) towards a yet more entire fall; when, although still calling itself christian, the mass of those who assumed the name of Christ would no longer endure the sound doctrine of the Holy Ghost. But, come what might, laboring with patience and diligence and energy as long as they would hearken, he was to be watchful,

to endure afflictions, to seek after souls still unconverted (a great proof of faith when the heart is burdened with the unfaithfulness of those within), and fully to exercise his ministry; with this additional motive, that apostolic energy was disappearing from the scene (chap. 4:6).

But there is yet something to notice at the beginning of this chapter. Fullness of grace, it is apparent, does not here characterise the epistle. His exhortation to Timothy is “before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the quick and dead at his appearing and his kingdom.” We have already spoken of this: the appearing of Jesus is in connection with responsibility; His coming is with the object of calling us to Himself in connection with our privileges. Here it is the first of these two cases; not the assembly, or the Father’s house, but God the appearing, and the kingdom. All that is in relation to responsibility, government, judgment, is gathered together in one point of view. The apostle however is not speaking of the assembly, nor does he throughout the epistle. The assembly moreover as such is not judged; she is the bride of the Lamb. Individuals are judged. Christendom which bears its name and responsibility, and necessarily so while the Holy Ghost is here below, is judged. We are warned of it in Ephesus (Revelation 2). Nay, judgment begins there. This is the assembly viewed as the house, not the body.

The portion of the assembly, and even of its members as such, is grace and not judgment. She goes to meet the Lord before His appearing. Here the apostle speaks of His appearing and His kingdom. It is as appearing in glory and clothed with the authority of the kingdom that He exercises judgment. The presentation of the assembly to Himself completes the work of grace with regard to that assembly. When the Lord appears, we shall appear with Him in glory; but it will be the glory of the kingdom (as we see in the transfiguration), and He will judge the living.

He will maintain the authority of His kingdom, as a new order of things, for a long period; and judgment will be exercised, if the occasion for it arises, during its whole continuance, for a king shall reign in righteousness; judgment and righteousness will be united. Before giving back this kingdom to God the Father, He judges the dead, for all judgment is committed to the Son. So that the kingdom is a new order of things founded on His appearing, in which judgment is exercised. The kingdom is founded by the

exclusion of Satan from heaven. It is established and its authority put in exercise at the appearing of the Lord.

The consciousness that this judgment is going to be exercised gives an impulse to love in the carrying out of ministry, gives it earnestness, and strengthens the hands by the sense of union with Him who will exercise it and also by the sense of personal responsibility.

The apostle uses his near departure as a fresh motive to exhort Timothy to the full exercise of his ministry. His own heart expands at the thought of that departure.

The absence therefore of apostolic ministry, so serious a fact with regard to the assembly's position, makes the duty of the man of God the more urgent. As Paul's absence is a motive for working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, so is it also a motive for him who is engaged in the work of the gospel to devote himself more than ever to his ministry, in order to supply as far as possible the lack of apostolic service by earnest care for souls, and by instructing them in the truth that he has learnt.

We cannot be apostles, or lay the foundation of the assembly. This is already done. But we may build upon that foundation by the truth which we have received from the apostle, by the scriptures which God has given us, by an unwearied love in the truth for souls. The foundation is not to be laid a second time. We give its value to the foundation, we give it its place, by building upon it, and by caring for the souls and the assembly, to which apostleship has given an ever-abiding place and foundation before God. This is what we have to do in the absence of the gift that lays the foundation.

The character that God appointed has already been stamped on the work: the one foundation has been laid. The assembly has its one and sole place according to the counsels of God. The rule given of God is in the word. We have but to act as the apostle leads according to the impulse already given by the Spirit. We cannot have apostolic authority: no one is an apostle in any such sense. This could not be, because we do not lay the foundation; it would be to deny that which has already been done. The foundation has been laid. We can labor according to the measure of our gift; and so much



the more devotedly, in proportion as we love the work which the apostle wrought and because he is no longer here to sustain it.

As to the apostle, he had finished his work; if others were unfaithful, he had been faithful. In the good fight of the gospel of God he had fought to the end, and successfully resisted all the attacks of the enemy. He had finished his course: it only remained for him to be crowned. He had kept the faith committed to him. The crown of righteousness, that is to say, the one bestowed by the righteous Judge who acknowledged his faithfulness, was laid up and kept for him. It was not till the day of retribution that he would receive it. We see plainly, that it is reward for labor and for faithfulness that is here meant. This — or its opposite — characterises the whole epistle, and not the privileges of grace.

The work of the Spirit through us is rewarded by the crown of righteousness, and every one will have a reward according to his labor. Christ brings us all according to the grace of God into the enjoyment of His own glory to be with Him and like Him. This is our common portion according to the eternal counsels of God; but a place is prepared by the Father and given by the Son according to the work wrought by the power of the Spirit in each believer in his particular position. It is not Paul only who will receive this crown from the righteous Judge; all who love the Lord's appearing will appear with Him in the glory that is personally destined to each, and that is adjudged to him when the Lord appears. Detached from this world, sensible that it is a perverse and rebellious one, feeling how much the dominion of Satan burdens the heart, the faithful long for the appearance of Him who will put an end to that dominion, to rebellion, oppression and misery, by bringing in — in His goodness, although by judgment — deliverance, peace, and freedom of heart, on the earth.

The Christian will share the Lord's glory when He shall appear: but this world also will be delivered.

We see here too that the privileges of the assembly as such are not the subject, but the public retribution manifested when Jesus shall appear to all; and the public establishment of His glory. The heart loves His appearing; not only the removal of evil, but the appearance of Him who removes it.

In that which follows we see what progress the evil had already made, and how the apostle counts upon the individual affection of his dear son in the faith. Probably there were good reasons for the departure of many, certainly for that of some; nevertheless it is true that the first thing that presents itself to the apostle's mind is the departure of Demas from purely worldly motives. The apostle felt himself isolated. Not only had the mass of Christians abandoned him, but his companions in labor had gone away. In the providence of God he was to be alone. He begs Timothy to come soon. Demas had forsaken him. The rest, from various motives, had quitted him; some he had sent away in connection with the work. It is not said that Demas had ceased to be a Christian — had publicly renounced the Lord; but it was not in his heart to bear the cross with the apostle.

In the midst of these sorrows a ray of grace and light shines through the darkness. The presence of Mark — whose service Paul had formerly refused, because he had shrunk from the perils of laboring among the Gentiles and had turned back to Jerusalem — is now desired by him, because he was useful for the ministry. It is most interesting to see, and a touching proof of the grace of God, that the afflictions of the apostle and the work of grace in Mark combine to set before us, as faithful and useful to Paul, the one who once had failed, and with whom the apostle would then have nothing to do. We also see the affections and confidence displayed in the smallest details of life. Full of power by the Spirit of God, the apostle is gentle, intimate, and confiding, with those who are upright and devoted. We see too that at the close of his life, devoted as he was, the occasion had presented itself for study (in connection assuredly with his work), and for writing that which he wished carefully to preserve — possibly his epistles.

This has an important place in scriptural instruction with regard to the life of the apostle. Paul was lost, so to speak, for the greater part, in the power of the Spirit; but when alone, with sober mind, he occupies himself intelligently and carefully about the things of God.

He warns Timothy with regard to a man who had shown his enmity, and puts him on his guard against him.

We see here also that the epistle bears the character of righteousness, grace having had its course. "The Lord," he says, "reward him according to his deeds." As for those who had not courage to stand by him, when he had to answer as a prisoner, he only prays for them. He had not been discouraged. His heart, broken by the unfaithfulness of the assembly, was strong in confessing the Lord before the world, and he can testify that, if forsaken by men, the Lord Himself stood with him and strengthened him. That he had to answer before the authorities was but an occasion to proclaim again in public that for which he was made a prisoner. Glorious power of the gospel where faith is in exercise! All that the enemy can do becomes a testimony, in order that the great, kings, those who were otherwise inaccessible, should hear the word of truth, the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The faithful witness was also delivered out of the lion's mouth. His strong and simple confidence counted on the Lord to the end. He would preserve him from every evil work unto His heavenly kingdom.

If the time of his departure was at hand, if he had to fall asleep instead of being changed, he had not ceased to be among those who looked for the Lord's appearing. Meanwhile he was going to be with Him, to have a place in the heavenly kingdom.

He salutes the brethren with whom Timothy was connected, and begs him to come before the winter. We also learn here, that the miraculous power granted to the apostles was exercised in the Lord's service, and not for their private interests, nor as their personal affection might suggest; for Paul had left Trophimus sick at Miletus.

It is evident that this epistle was written when the apostle thought his departure near at hand, and when the faith of Christians had grievously declined, which was proved by their having forsaken the apostle. His faith was sustained by grace. He did not hide from himself that all was going wrong: his heart felt it — was broken by it; he saw that it would grow worse and worse. But his own testimony stood firm; he was strong for the Lord through grace. The strength of the Lord was with him to confess Christ, and to exhort Timothy to so much the more diligent and devoted an exercise of his ministry, because the days were evil.

This is very important. If we love the Lord, if we feel what He is to the assembly, we feel that in the latter all is in ruin. Personal courage is not weakened, for the Lord remains ever the same, faithful, and using His power for us: if not in the assembly which rejects it, it is in those who stand fast that He will exercise His power according to the individual need created by this state of things.

May we remember this. Insensibility to the state of the assembly is not a proof that we are near the Lord, or that we have confidence in Him; but in the consciousness of this ruin, faith, the sense of what Christ is, will give confidence in Him amidst the ruin which we mourn. Nevertheless it will be observed, that the apostle speaks here of the individual, of righteousness, of judgment, and not of the assembly. If the latter is spoken of outwardly as the great house, it contains vessels to dishonor, from which we are to purge ourselves. Yet the apostle foresaw a still worse state of things — which has now set in. But the Lord can never fail in His faithfulness.

The first of Timothy gives directions for the order of the assembly; the second, for the path of the servant of God when it is in disorder and failure.

## TITUS

The epistle to Titus is occupied with the maintenance of order in the churches of God.

The especial object of those written to Timothy was the maintenance of sound doctrine, although speaking of other things with regard to which the apostle gives directions for the conduct of Timothy. This the apostle himself tells us. In the first epistle to Timothy we see that Paul had left his beloved son in the faith at Ephesus, in order to watch that no other doctrine was preached there; the assembly is the pillar and support of the truth. In the second epistle we find the means by which Christians are to be strengthened in the truth, when the mass have departed from it.

Here, in Titus, the apostle says expressly that he had left him in Crete to set in order things that were yet wanting, and to establish elders in every city. Although more or less the same dangers presented themselves to the mind of Paul as when writing to Timothy, yet we find that the apostle enters at once upon his subject, with a calmness which shows that his mind was not pre-occupied in the same way with those dangers, and that the Spirit could engage him more entirely with the ordinary walk of the assembly; so that this epistle is much more simple in its character. The walk that becomes Christians, with regard to the maintenance of order in their relationships to each other, and the great principles on which this walk is founded, form the subject of the book. The state of the assembly comes but little before us. Truths that flow more entirely from the christian revelation, and that characterise it, have more place in this epistle than in those addressed to Timothy. On the other hand, prophecies concerning the future condition of Christianity, and the development of the decline that had already commenced, are not repeated here. While stating in a remarkable way certain truths with respect to Christianity, the tone of the epistle is more calm, more ordinary.

The promise of life is particularly spoken of here as well as in Timothy. Moreover this promise distinguishes Christianity, and the revelation of God (as the Father) in Christ, from Judaism.

But in this epistle the great boundaries of Christianity are set forth at the outset. The faith of the elect, the truth which is according to godliness, the promise before the world began of eternal life, and the manifestation of the word of God through preaching, are the subjects of the introduction. The title of “Savior” is here, as in Timothy, added to the name of God as well as to that of Christ.

This introduction is not without importance. That which it contains is presented to Titus by the apostle as characterising his apostleship, and as the special subject of his ministry. It was not a development of Judaism, but the revelation of a life and of a promise of life which subsisted (that is, in Christ, the object of the divine counsels) before the world was.

Accordingly faith was found, not in the confession of the Jews, but in the elect brought by grace to the knowledge of the truth. It was the faith of the elect: this is an important truth, and that which characterises faith in the world. Others may indeed adopt it as a system; but faith is in itself the faith of the elect.

Among the Jews this was not the case. The public confession of their doctrine, and confidence in the promises of God, belonged to every one who was born an Israelite. Others may pretend to the christian faith; but it is the faith of the elect. Its character is such that human nature neither embraces it nor conceives it, but finds it to be a stumbling-stone. It discloses a relationship with God, which to nature is inconceivable and at the same time presumptuous and insupportable. To the elect it is the joy of their soul, the light of their understanding, and the sustainment of their heart. It places them in a relationship with God which is all that their heart can desire, but which depends entirely on that which God is; and this the believer desires. It is a personal relationship with God Himself; therefore it is the faith of God’s elect. Hence also it is for all the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

This faith of God’s elect has an intimate character in relation to God Himself. It rests on Him, it knows the secret of His eternal counsels — that love which made the elect the object of His counsels. But there is another character connected with it, namely, confession before men. There is the revealed truth by which God makes Himself known, and claims the

submission of man's mind and the homage of his heart. This truth places the soul in a true relationship with God. It is truth according to godliness.

The confession of the truth therefore is an important character of Christianity, and of the Christian. There is in the heart the faith of the elect, personal faith in God and in the secret of His love; and there is confession of the truth.

Now that which formed the hope of this faith was not earthly prosperity, a numerous posterity, the earthly blessing of a people whom God acknowledged as His own. It was life eternal, promised of God in Christ before the world was, outside the world and the divine government of the world and the development of the character of Jehovah in that government.

It was eternal life. It is in connection with the nature and with the character of God Himself; and, having its source in Him, proceeding from Him, it was the thought of His grace, and declared to be such in Christ, before a world existed into which the first man was introduced in responsibility (his failure in which is his history up to Christ the second Man, and the cross in which He bore its consequences for us, and obtained that eternal life for us in its full glory with Himself), and which was the sphere of the development of God's government over that which was subject to Him — a very different thing from the communion of a life by which one participates in His nature, and which is its reflection. This is the hope of the gospel (for we are not speaking of the assembly here), the secret treasure of the faith of the elect, of which the revealed word assures us.

“Promised before the world began” is a remarkable and important expression. One is admitted into the thoughts of God before the existence of this changing and mingled scene, which bears witness of the frailty and sin of the creature — of the patience of God, and His ways in grace and in government. Eternal life is connected with the unchangeable nature of God; with counsels which are as abiding as His nature, with His promises, in which He cannot deceive us, and to which He cannot be unfaithful. Our portion in life existed before the foundation of the world, not only in the counsels of God, not only in the Person of the Son, but in the promises made to the Son as our portion in Him. It was the subject of those communications from the Father to the Son, of which we were the objects, the Son being their depository.\* Marvellous knowledge which has been

given us of the heavenly communication of which the Son was the object, in order that we might understand the interest which we have in the thoughts of God, of which we were the objects in Christ before all the ages!

[\* Compare Proverbs 8:30, 31, and Luke 2:14, and Psalm 40:6-8, “hast thou opened” being really, “thou hast dug ears for me” — that is, prepared a body, the place of obedience, or a servant (Philippians 2); so translated by LXX, and accepted in Hebrews as just.]

That which the word is becomes also more clear to us through this passage. The word is the communication, in time, of the eternal thoughts of God Himself in Christ. It finds man under the power of sin, and reveals peace and deliverance, and it shows how he can have part in the result of God’s thoughts. But these thoughts themselves are nothing else than the plan, the eternal purpose, of His grace in Christ, to bestow on us everlasting life in Christ — a life which existed in God before the world was. The word is preached, manifested (that is, the revelation of the thoughts of God in Christ). Now those thoughts gave us eternal life in Christ; and this was promised before the ages. The elect, believing, know it, and possess the life itself. They have the witness in themselves; but the word is the public revelation on which faith is founded, and which has universal authority over the consciences of men, whether they receive it or not. Just as in 2 Timothy 1:9, 10, it is presented as salvation, but then made manifest.

It will be observed that faith here, is faith in a personally held, known, truth; a faith which only the elect can have, who possess the truth as God teaches it. “The faith” is used also for Christianity as a system in contrast with Judaism. Here it is the secret of God in contrast with a law promulgated to an outward people. This promise, which dated from before the revealed ages, and which was sovereign in its application, was especially committed to the apostle Paul that he might announce it by preaching. To Peter the gospel was committed more as the fulfillment of the promises made to the fathers, which Paul also recognises, with the evangelical events that confirmed and developed them by the power of God manifested in the resurrection of Jesus, the witness of the power of this life.



John presents life more in the Person of Christ and then imparted to us, the characteristic fruits of which he sets forth.

We shall find that the apostle has not the same intimacy of confidence in Titus as in Timothy. He does not open his heart to him in the same way. Titus is a beloved and faithful servant of God and also the apostle's son in the faith; but Paul does not open his heart to him in the same manner — does not communicate to him his anxieties, his complainings — does not pour out his soul to him — as he did to Timothy. To tell of all one sees that is heart-breaking and disquieting in the work one is engaged in — that is the proof of confidence. One has confidence with regard to the work, and one speaks of it with regard to oneself, with regard to all, and there is no restraint, no measuring how far one ought to speak of oneself, of what one feels, of all things. This the apostle does with Timothy, and the Holy Ghost has been pleased to portray it for us. In writing to Timothy doctrine above all occupied the apostle's mind: by its means the enemy wrought and endeavored to ruin the assembly. Bishops only come into mind as an accessory thing. Here they have a primary place. Paul had left Titus in Crete to set in order the things that were yet wanting, and to ordain elders in every city, as he had already commanded him. It is not here a question of the desire any one might have to become a bishop, nor (in that view) of describing the character suitable to this charge, but of appointing them; and for this task Titus was furnished with authority on the apostle's part. The necessary qualifications are made known to him, in order that he might be able to decide according to apostolic wisdom. So that on the one hand he was invested by the apostle with authority to appoint them, and on the other hand instructed by him with respect to the requisite qualifications. Apostolic authority and wisdom concurred to render him competent to perform this grave and important work.

We see also that this apostolic delegate was authorised to set in order that which was necessary to the welfare of the assemblies in Crete. Already founded, they yet needed directions with regard to many details of their walk; and apostolic care was requisite to give them these, as well as for the establishment of functionaries in the assemblies. This task the apostle had committed to the approved fidelity of Titus, furnished with his own authority by word of mouth and here in writing; so that to reject Titus was to reject the apostle and consequently the Lord who had sent him.

Authority in the assembly of God is a serious thing — a thing that proceeds from God Himself. It can be exercised through influence by the gift of God; by functionaries, when God establishes them by instruments whom He has chosen and sent for this purpose.

It is not necessary here to enter upon the detail of qualifications that were needed to fill the office of bishop suitably. They are, in the main, the same as those mentioned in the epistle to Timothy. They are qualities, not gifts; qualities — outward, moral, and circumstantial — that proved the fitness of the individual for the charge of watching over others. It may perhaps occasion surprise that the absence of gross misconduct should have a place here; but the assemblies were more simple than people think, and the persons of whom they were composed had but recently come out from the most deplorable habits; and therefore a previous conduct that commanded the respect of others was necessary to give weight to the exercise of the office of superintendence. It was also needful that he who was invested with this charge should be able to convince gainsayers. For they would have to do with such, especially among the Jews, who were always and everywhere active in opposition to the truth, and subtle in perverting the mind.

The character of the Cretans occasioned other difficulties, and required the exercise of peremptory authority; Judaism mingled itself with the effect of this national character. It was needful to be firm and to act with authority, that they might continue sound in the faith.

Moreover, he had still to speak concerning ordinances and traditions, those evil plagues in the church of God which provoke Him to jealousy, and which, by exalting man, are opposed to His grace. One thing was not pure, another was forbidden by an ordinance. God claims the heart. To the pure all things are pure; for him whose heart is defiled it needs not to go out of himself to find that which is impure; but convenient, in order to be able to forget what is within. The mind and conscience are already corrupt. They talk of knowing God, but in their works they deny Him, being unprofitable and reprobate as regards every work really good.

Titus, who was not only to appoint others for the purpose, but, being there clothed with authority, was himself to watch over the order and moral walk of the Christians, was charged (as is the case throughout these

three epistles) to see that every one, according to his position, walked in agreement with moral and relative propriety — an important thing, and which shelters from the attacks of Satan, and from confusion in the assembly. True liberty reigns in the assembly; moral order secures this; and the enemy finds no better occasion to dishonor the Lord and ruin the testimony and throw all into disorder, thus giving the world occasion to blaspheme, than the forgetfulness of grace and holy order among Christians. Let us not deceive ourselves: if these proprieties are not maintained (and they are beautiful and precious), then the liberty (and it is beautiful and precious, and unknown to the world, who are ignorant of what grace is), the excellent liberty of the christian life, gives room for disorder which dishonors the Lord and throws moral confusion into everything.

Often, in perceiving that the weakness of man has given occasion to disorder where christian liberty reigns, instead of seeking the true remedy, men have destroyed the liberty; they banish the power and operation of the Spirit — for where the Spirit is, there is liberty in every sense — the joy of the new relationships in which all are one. But, while severing every bond for the Lord's sake when necessary, the Spirit recognises every relationship which God has formed; even when we break them — as death does — through the exigency of the call of Christ, which is superior to them all. But while we are in them (the call of Christ apart), we are to act suitably to the relationship. Age and youth, husband and wife, child and parent, slave and master, all have their own proprieties to maintain towards each other, a behavior in accordance with the position in which we stand.

“Sound doctrine” takes account of all this, and, in its warnings and exhortations, maintains all these proprieties. This is the instruction which the apostle here gives to Titus, with regard to aged men, aged women, young women (relatively to their husbands, their children, and their whole life, which should be domestic and modest); young men, to whom Titus was to be always a pattern; slaves, with their masters; and then the duties of all towards magistrates, and indeed towards all men. But, before taking up this last point, he establishes the great principles which are the foundation of the conduct of the saints amongst themselves in this world. Their conduct towards magistrates and the world has a different motive.

The conduct of Christians, as such, in the assembly has for its basis and motive the special doctrines of Christianity. We find these doctrines and motives in chapter 2:11-15, which speaks of that conduct.

The particular motive for the character of their walk, with regard to the world, we find in the third and following verses of chapter 3.

**CHAPTER 2:**11-15 contains a remarkable summary of Christianity, not exactly of its dogmas, but as a practical reality for men. Grace has appeared. It has appeared, not limited to a particular people, but to all men; not charged with temporal promises and blessings but bringing salvation. It comes from God to men with salvation. It does not expect righteousness from men, it brings salvation to those that need it. Precious and simple truth, which makes us know God, which puts us in our place, but according to the grace which has overleaped every barrier in order to address itself, in the sovereign goodness of God, to every man on the earth!

Having brought this salvation, it instructs us perfectly with regard to our walk in this world; and that in relation to ourselves, and to other men, and to God. Renouncing all ungodliness, and all lusts that find their gratification in this world, we are to bridle the will of the flesh in every respect and to live soberly; we are to acknowledge the claims of others and to live righteously; we are to own the rights of God over our hearts and to exercise godliness.

But our future also is enlightened by grace. It teaches us to wait for the blessed hope, and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Grace has appeared. It teaches us how to walk here below, and to expect the appearing of the glory in the Person of Jesus Christ Himself. And our hope is well founded. Christ is justly precious to us. We can have full confidence of heart in thinking of His appearing in glory, as well as the most powerful motive for a life devoted to His glory. He gave Himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity, and to purify for Himself a people who should belong to Him in His own right, and be zealous — according to His will and His nature — of good works.

This is what Christianity is. It has provided for all, the past, the present, and the future, according to God. It delivers us from this world, making of us a people set apart for Christ Himself, according to the love in which He gave Himself for us. It is purification, but a purification which consecrates us to Christ. We belong to Him as His peculiar portion, His possession in the world; animated with the love that is in Him, in order to do good to others and bear testimony to His grace. This is a precious testimony to that which Christianity is, in its practical reality, as the work of the grace of God.

With respect to the conduct of Christians towards the world, grace has banished violence, and the spirit of rebellion and resistance which agitates the heart of those who believe not, and which has its source in the self-will that strives to maintain its own rights relatively to others.

The Christian has his portion, his inheritance, elsewhere; he is tranquil and submissive here and ready to do good. Even when others are violent and unjust towards him, he bears it in remembrance that once it was no otherwise with himself: a difficult lesson, for violence and injustice stir up the heart; but the thought that it is sin, and that we also were formerly its slaves, produces patience and piety. Grace alone has made the difference, and according to that grace are we to act towards others.

The apostle gives a grievous summary of the characteristics of man after the flesh — that which we once were. Sin was foolishness — was disobedience; the sinner was deceived — was the slave of lusts, filled with malice and envy, hateful, and hating others. Such is man characterised by sin. But the kindness of God, of a Savior-God, His goodwill and charity towards men (sweet and precious character of God!)\* has appeared. The character that He has assumed is that of Savior, a name especially given Him in these three epistles, in order that we should bear its stamp in our walk, that it should pervade our spirit. Our walk in the world and our conduct towards others depend on the principles of our relationships with God. That which has made us different from others is not some merit in ourselves, some personal superiority: we were sometime even as they. It is the tender love and grace of the God of mercy. He has been kind and merciful to us: we have known what it is, and are so to others. It is true that in cleansing and renewing us this mercy has wrought by a principle,

and in a sphere of a life, that are entirely new, so that we cannot walk with the world as we did before; but we act towards others who are still in the mire of this world, as God has acted towards us to bring us out of it, that we might enjoy those things which, according to the same principle of grace, we desire that others also should enjoy. The sense of what we once were, and of the way in which God has acted towards us, combine to govern our conduct towards others.

[\* In Greek it is the word philanthropy, which is here used in speaking of God; and which moreover has much greater force than the English word, because phil is an especial affection for anything, a friendship.]

Now when the kindness of a Savior-God appeared, it was not something vague and uncertain; He has saved us, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy by washing and renewing us. This is the double character of the work in us, the same two points which we find in John 3 in the Lord's discourse with Nicodemus; except that here is added that which has now its place because of the work of Christ, namely, that the Holy Ghost is also shed on us abundantly to be the strength of that new life of which He is the source. The man is washed, cleansed. He is washed from his former habits, thoughts, desires, in the practical sense. We wash a thing that exists. The man was morally bad and defiled in his inward and outward life. God has saved us by purifying us; He could not do it otherwise. To be in relationship with Himself there must be practical purity.

But this purification was thorough. It was not the outside of the vessel. It was purification by means of regeneration; identified with the communication of a new life no doubt, which is the source of new thoughts, in connection with God's new creation, and capable of enjoying His presence and in the light of His countenance, but which in itself is a passage from the state we were in into a wholly new one, from flesh by death into the status of a risen Christ.

But there was a power which acted in this new life and accompanies it in the Christian. It is not merely a subjective change, as they say. There is an active divine Agent who imparts something new, of which He is Himself the source — the Holy Ghost Himself. It is God acting in the creature (for it is by the Spirit that God always acts immediately on the creature); and it is in the character of the Holy Ghost that He acts in this work of renewal.

It is a new source of thoughts in relationship with God; not only a vital capacity, but an energy which produces that which is new in us.

It has been a question, When does this renewal by the Holy Ghost take place? Is it at the commencement, or is it after the regeneration\* of which the apostle speaks? I think that the apostle speaks of it according to the character of the work; and adds “shed on us” (that which characterises the grace of this present period) to show that there is an additional truth, namely, that the Holy Ghost, as “shed on us,” continues in order to maintain by His power the enjoyment of the relationship into which He has brought us. The man is cleansed in connection with the new order of things; but the Holy Ghost is a source of an entirely new life, entirely new thoughts; not only of a new moral being, but of the communication of all that in which this new being develops itself. We cannot separate the nature from the objects with regard to which the nature develops itself, and which form the sphere of its existence and characterise it.

[\* The Greek word here used is not being born again. It is used, besides this passage, only in the end of Matthew 19 for the millennium. The renewing of the Holy Ghost is a distinct thing from the regeneration. This last is a change of one state of things to another.]

It is the Holy Ghost who gives the thoughts, who creates and forms the whole moral being of the new man. The thought and that which thinks cannot be separated, morally, when the heart is occupied with it. The Holy Ghost is the source of all in the saved man: he is ultimately saved, because this is the case with him.

The Holy Ghost does not only give a new nature; He gives it us in connection with an entirely new order of things (“a new creation”), and fills us as to our thoughts with the things that are in this new creation. This is the reason, that, although we are placed in it once for all, this work — as to the operation of the Holy Ghost — continues; because He ever communicates to us more and more of the things of this new world into which He has brought us. He takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us; and all that the Father has is Christ’s. I think that the “renewing of the Holy Ghost” embraces all this; because He says, “which he has shed on us abundantly.” So that it is not only that we are born of Him, but that He works in us, communicating to us all that is ours in Christ.

The Holy Ghost is shed on us abundantly by means of Jesus Christ our Savior, in order that, having been justified by the grace of this Savior, we should be heirs according to the hope of eternal life. I think that the antecedent of “that,” v. 7, is “the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost”; and that the sentence, “which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,” is an accessory parenthesis introduced to show us that we have the fullness of the enjoyment of these things by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Thus He has saved us by this renewing that we may be heirs according to the hope of eternal life. It is nothing outward, earthly, or corporeal. Grace has given us eternal life. In order to this, we have been justified by the grace of Christ. Thus there is energy, power, hope, through the rich gift of the Holy Ghost. In order to our participating in it we have been justified by His grace, and our inheritance is in the incorruptible joy of eternal life.

God has saved us, not by works — nor by means of\* anything that we are, but by His mercy. But then He has acted towards us according to the riches of His own grace, according to the thoughts of His own heart.

[\* Here, as everywhere, the responsibility of man and God’s saving grace, by which purpose also is accomplished, are clearly distinguished.]

With these things the apostle desires that Titus should be occupied — with that which brings us with thanksgiving into practical connection with God Himself and makes us feel what our portion is, our eternal portion, before Him. This acts upon the conscience, fills us with love and good works, makes us respect all the relationships of which God Himself is the center. We are in relationship with God according to His rights; we are before God, who causes everything that He has Himself established to be respected by the conscience.

Idle questions and disputes on the law Titus was to avoid, together with everything that would destroy the simplicity of our relationship with God according to the immediate revelation of Himself and of His will in Jesus Christ. It is still the Gnostic Judaism setting itself up against the simplicity of the gospel; it is the law and human righteousness, and that which, by means of intermediate beings, destroys the simplicity and the immediate character of our relationship with the God of grace.



When a man tried to set up his own opinions, and by that means to form parties in the assembly, after having admonished him once and a second time, he was to be rejected; his faith was subverted. He sins, he is judged of himself. He is not satisfied with the assembly of God, with the truth of God: he wants to make a truth of his own. Why is he a Christian, if Christianity, as God has given it, does not suffice him? By making a party for his own opinions he condemns himself.

We have, at the end of the epistle, a little glimpse of the christian activity which the love of God produces, the pains taken that the flock should enjoy all the help with which God supplies the assembly. Paul wished that Titus should come to him: but the Cretans needed his services; and the apostle makes the arrival of Artemas or Tychicus (the latter well known by the services he had rendered to Paul) the condition of the departure of Titus from the field in which he was laboring. We find too that Zenas, a lawyer, and Apollos, who had also displayed his active zeal at Ephesus and Corinth, were disposed to occupy themselves in Crete with the work of the Lord.

Observe also that we have the two kinds of laborers: those who were in personal connection with the apostle as fellow-laborers, who accompanied him, and whom he sent elsewhere to continue the work he had begun, when he could no longer carry it on himself; and those who labored freely and independently of him. But there was no jealousy of this double activity. He did not neglect the flock that were dear to him. He was glad that any who were sound in the faith should water the plants which he himself had planted. He encourages Titus to show them all affection, and to provide whatever they needed in their journey. This thought suggests to him the counsel that follows; namely, that it would be well for Christians to learn how to do useful work in order to supply the wants of others as well as their own.

The apostle ends his epistle with the salutations that christian love always produces; but, as we saw at the beginning, there is not here the same expansion of heart that we find in Paul's communications to Timothy. Grace is the same everywhere; but there are special affections and relationships in the assembly of God.

## PHILEMON

The very beautiful and interesting epistle to Philemon does not require much comment; it is an expression of the love which works by the Spirit within the assembly of God in all the circumstances of individual life.

Written for the purpose of awakening in Philemon sentiments which certain events had a tendency to extinguish in his heart, this epistle is suited to produce those feelings in the reader more than to be the object of explanation.

It is a fine picture of the way in which the tenderness and the strength of the love of God, working in the heart, occupies itself with every detail wherein that love might be wounded, or that might be an occasion for its growth and manifestation. In this point of view the epistle is as important as beautiful; for this development of tender and delicate consideration in the midst of the apostle's gigantic labors, and of the immense truths that formed the basis of relationship between all creatures and God in Christ, gives a very peculiar character to Christianity and shows its divine nature; since He who reveals the most profound truths, and puts them in their right place in the circle of divine thought, does so as speaking of a known thing, as communicating His own thoughts; and can (being the Spirit of the God of love) fill the heart with considerations which love only can suggest, with a dignity which manifests their source, and with a delicacy of application which shows that, whatever be the grandeur of His thoughts, He is at liberty to consider everything.

When the human mind is occupied with elevated subjects, it feels their weight, and bends under the load; it is absorbed; it has to abstract itself, to fix its attention. God reveals His own thoughts; and, vast as they may be to the human mind, they flow with the clearness and connectedness that is natural to them, when He communicates them by His chosen instruments. The latter are free to love; for the God who employs them and inspires them is love. It is a more essential part of their task to present Him thus, than even to speak of the deep things. Accordingly, when they are moved by that love, the character of Him who sends them is demonstrated as that

of the God who is the source of love, by a perfect consideration for others, and the most delicate attention to those things which their hearts would feel.

Moreover this love develops itself in relationships formed by the Holy Ghost Himself, between the members of the body of Christ, that is to say, between men. Springing from a divine source, and always fed by it, christian affections assume the form of human regard, which, by exhibiting love and the opposite of selfishness, bear the stamp of their origin. Love, free from self, can and does think of all that concerns others and understands what will affect them.

## PHILEMON

Onesimus, a fugitive slave, had been converted by means of Paul in his bonds. Philemon, a rich man or at least one of easy fortune, received the assembly in his house (his wife being also converted), and in his measure labored himself in the Lord's work. Archippus was a servant of the Lord, who ministered in the assembly, perhaps an evangelist; at any rate he took part in the conflicts of the gospel, and was thus associated with Philemon and the assembly.

The apostle, in sending Onesimus back, addresses the whole assembly. This is the reason that we have here, "grace and peace," without the addition of "mercy," as when individuals only are addressed by the apostles. His appeal on behalf of Onesimus is to Philemon; but the whole assembly is to interest itself in this beloved slave, who was become a child of God. Their christian hearts would be a support and a guarantee for the conduct of Philemon; although the apostle expects pardon and kindness for Onesimus from the love of Philemon himself as a servant of God.

Paul (as was his custom) recognises all the good that was in Philemon, and uses it as a motive to Philemon himself, that he might let the feelings of grace flow out freely, in spite of anything that the return of Onesimus might excite in the flesh or any displeasure that Satan might try to re-awaken in him. The apostle would have that which he desired for Onesimus to be Philemon's own act. The enfranchisement of his former slave, or even his kind reception as a brother, would have quite a different bearing in that case, than if it had arisen from a command on the apostle's

part; for christian affection and the bonds of love were in question. He gives due weight to the right he had to command, but only in order to abandon it, and to give more force to his request; and at the same time he suggests that the communion of Philemon's faith with the whole assembly of God and with the apostle — that is, the way in which his faith connected him, in the activities of christian love, with the assembly of God and those appointed by him to labor in it, and with the Lord Himself — which had already shown itself so honorably in Philemon, would have its full development in the acknowledgement of all the apostle's rights over his heart.

In verse 6 we must read “every good thing which is in us.”

It is beautiful to see the mixture of affection for Onesimus — which shows itself in an anxiety that makes him plead every motive which could act on the heart of Philemon — with the christian feeling that inspired him with full confidence in the kindly affections of this faithful and excellent brother. The return of his fugitive slave was indeed likely to stir up something in his natural heart; the apostle interposes his letter on behalf of his dear child in the faith, born in the time of his captivity. God had interposed the work of His grace, which ought to act on the heart of Philemon, producing altogether new relationships with Onesimus. The apostle beseeches him to receive his former slave as a brother, but it is evident (v. 12), although Paul wished it to be the spontaneous act of the master whom Onesimus had wronged, that the apostle expected the enfranchisement of the latter. Be that as it may, he takes everything upon himself for his dear son. According to grace Onesimus was more profitable to Philemon, as well as to Paul, than formerly, when the flesh had made him an unfaithful and valueless servant; and this he should rejoice in (v. 11). Paul alludes to the name of “Onesimus,” which means “profitable.” Finally, he reminds Philemon that he was indebted to him for his own salvation — for his life as a Christian.

Paul at this moment was a prisoner at Rome. God had brought Onesimus there (whither all resorted) to lead him to salvation and the knowledge of the Lord, in order that we should be instructed, and that Onesimus should have a new position in the christian assembly.\* It was apparently towards

the end of the apostle's imprisonment. He hopes at least soon to be released and tells Philemon to prepare him a lodging.

[\* It seems to me, from the way in which the apostle speaks, that he even thought Onesimus would be an instrument of God in the assembly, useful in the Lord's service. He would have retained him to minister to himself in the bonds of the gospel; but he respects his connection with Philemon. It was also much better for the soul of Onesimus that he should submit himself where he had done wrong; and if he was to be free, that he should receive his freedom from the love of Philemon.]

We find the names again in the epistle to the Colossians. There the apostle says, "Onesimus, who is one of you"; so that, if it be the same, he was of Colosse. It seems likely, because there is Archippus also, who is exhorted to take heed to his ministry. If it be so, the fact that he speaks thus of Onesimus to the Christians at Colosse is another proof of his loving care for this new convert. He lays him thus upon the hearts of the assembly, sending his letter by him and Tychicus. In the epistle to the Ephesians there are no salutations; but the same Tychicus is its bearer. Timothy is joined with Paul in the address of the epistle to the Colossians, as well as in this to Philemon. It was not so in the epistle to the Ephesians; but in that to the Philippians, to whom the apostle hoped to send Timothy ere long, their two names are again united.

I do not draw any conclusions from these last details; but they furnish ground for inquiry into details. Each of the four epistles was written during the apostle's captivity at Rome, and when he was expecting to be delivered from that captivity.

Finally, that which we have especially to remark in the epistle to Philemon is the love which, in the intimate center of this circle (guarded all round by an unparalleled development of doctrine) reigned and bore fruit, and bound the members of Christ together, and spread the savor of grace over all the relationships in which men could stand towards each other, occupying itself about all the details of life with a perfect propriety, and with the recognition of every right that can exist among men and of all that the human heart can feel.

## HEBREWS

The important nature of the epistle to the Hebrews demands that we should examine it with peculiar care. It has its own very distinct place. It is not the presentation of christian position in itself, viewed as the fruit of sovereign grace, and of the work and the resurrection of Christ, or as the result of the union of Christians with Christ, the members of the body with the Head — a union which gives them the enjoyment of every privilege in Him. It is an epistle in which one who has apprehended indeed the whole scope of Christianity, considered as placing the Christian in Christ before God, whether individually or as a member of the body, looks nevertheless at the Lord from here below; and presents His Person and His offices as between us and God in heaven, while we are in feebleness on earth, for the purpose of detaching us (as walking on earth) from all that would attach us in a religious way to the earth; even when — as was the case among the Jews — the bond had been ordained by God Himself.

This epistle shows us Christ in heaven, and consequently that our religious bonds with God are heavenly, although we are not yet personally in heaven ourselves nor viewed as united to Christ there. Every bond with the earth is broken, even while we are walking on the earth.

These instructions naturally are given in an epistle addressed to the Jews, because their religious relationships had been earthly, and at the same time solemnly appointed by God Himself. The heathen, as to their religions, had no formal relationships except with demons.

In the case of the Jews this rupture with the earth was in its nature so much the more solemn, the more absolute and conclusive, from the relationship having been divine. This relationship was to be fully acknowledged and entirely abandoned, not here because the believer is dead and risen again in Christ, but because Christ in heaven takes the place of all earthly figures and ordinances. God Himself, who had instituted the ordinances of the law, now established other bonds, different indeed in character; but it was still the same God.

This fact gives occasion for His relationships with Israel being resumed by Him hereafter when the nation shall be, re-established and in the enjoyment of the promises. Not that this epistle views them as actually on that ground; on the contrary it insists on what is heavenly, and walking by faith as Abraham and others who had not the promises, but it lays down principles which can apply to that position, and in one or two passages it leaves (and ought to leave) a place for this ultimate blessing of the nation. The epistle to the Romans, in the direct instruction which it furnishes, cannot leave this place for the blessings proper to the Jewish people. In its point of view all are alike sinners, and all in Christ are justified together before God in heaven. Still less in the epistle to the Ephesians, with the object which it has in view, could there be room for speaking of the future blessing of God's people on the earth. It only contemplates Christians as united to their heavenly Head, as His body; or as the habitation of God on earth by the Holy Ghost. The epistle to the Romans, in the passage that shows the compatibility of this salvation (which, because it was of God, was for all without distinction) with the faithfulness of God to His promises made to the nation, touches the chord of which we speak even more distinctly than the epistle to the Hebrews; and shows us that Israel will — although in a different way from before — resume their place in the line peculiar to their heirs of promise; a place which, through their sin, was partially left vacant for a time to allow the bringing in of the Gentiles on the principle of faith into this blessed succession. We find this in Romans 11. But the object in both epistles is to separate the faithful entirely from earth, and to bring them into relationship religiously with heaven; the one (that to the Romans) as regards their personal presentation to God by means of forgiveness and divine righteousness; the other, with respect to the means that God has established, in order that the believer, in his walk here below, may find his present relationships with heaven maintained and his daily connection with God preserved in its integrity.

I have said preserved, because this is the subject of the epistle;\* but it must be added, that these relationships are established on this ground by divine revelations, which communicate the will of God and the conditions under which He is pleased to connect Himself with His people.

[\* It will be found, I think, that in Hebrews the exercise of the heavenly priesthood is not applied to the case of a fall into sin. It is for mercy and grace to help in time of need. Its subject is access to God, having the High

Priest on high; and this we always have. The conscience is always perfect (chaps. 9 and 10) as to imputation and thus going to God. In 1 John, where communion is spoken of, which is interrupted by sin, we have an advocate with the Father if any man sin — this also founded on perfect righteousness and propitiation in Him. The priesthood of Christ reconciles a perfect heavenly standing with God, with a weak condition on earth ever liable to failure — gives comfort and dependence in the path through the desert.]

We should also remark, that in the epistle to the Hebrews, although the relationship of the people with God is established on a new ground, being founded on the heavenly position of the Mediator, they are considered as already existing. God treats with a people already known to Him. He addresses persons in relationship with Himself, and who for a long period have held the position of a people whom God had taken out from the world unto Himself. It is not, as in Romans, sinners without law or transgressors of the law, between whom there is no difference, because all have alike come entirely short of the glory of God, all alike are the children of wrath, or, as in Ephesians, an entirely new creation unknown before. They were in need of some better thing; but those here addressed were in that need because they were in relationship with God, and the condition of their relationship with Him brought nothing to perfection. That which they possessed was in fact nothing but signs and figures; still, the people were, I again say, a people in relationship with God. Many of them might refuse the new method of blessing and grace, and consequently would be lost; but the link between the people and God is accounted to subsist: only that, Messiah having been revealed, a place among that people could not be had but in the recognition of Messiah.

It is very important for the understanding of this epistle to apprehend this point, namely, that it is addressed to Hebrews on the ground of a relationship which still existed,\* although it only retained its force in so far as they acknowledged the Messiah, who was its corner-stone. Hence the first words connect their present state with previous revelations, instead of breaking off all connection and introducing a new thing as yet unrevealed.

[\* He sanctifies the people with His own blood. They count the blood of the covenant wherewith they were sanctified an unholy thing. There is no inward sanctifying operation of the Spirit spoken of in Hebrews, though there are exhortations to the pursuit of holiness.]



Some remarks on the form of the epistle will help us to understand it better.

It does not contain the name of its author. The reason of this is touching and remarkable. It is that the Lord Himself, according to this epistle, was the Apostle of Israel. The apostles whom He sent were only employed to confirm His words by transmitting them to others, God Himself confirming their testimony by miraculous gifts. This also makes us understand that, although as Priest the Lord is in heaven for the exercise of His priesthood there, and in order to establish on new ground the relationship of the people with God, yet the communications of God with His people by means of the Messiah had begun when Jesus was on earth living in their midst. Consequently the character of their relationship was not union with Him in heaven; it was relationship with God on the ground of divine communications and of the service of a Mediator with God.

Moreover this epistle is a discourse, a treatise, rather than a letter addressed in the exercise of apostolic functions to saints with whom the writer was personally in connection. The author takes the place of a teacher rather than of an apostle. He speaks doubtless from the height of the heavenly calling, but in connection with the actual position of the Jewish people; nevertheless, it was for the purpose of making believers at length understand that they must abandon that position.

The time for judgment on the nation was drawing near; and with regard to this the destruction of Jerusalem had great significance, because it definitely broke off all outward relationship between God and the Jewish people. There was no longer an altar or sacrifice, priest or sanctuary. Every link was then broken by judgment, and remains broken until it shall be formed again under the new covenant according to grace.

Further, it will be found that there is more contrast than comparison. The veil is compared, but then, closing the entrance to the sanctuary, now, a new and living way into it; a sacrifice, but then repeated, so as to say sins were still there, now once for all so that there is no remembrance of sins; and so of every important particular.

The author of this epistle (Paul, I doubt not, but this is of little importance) employed other motives than that of the approaching

judgment to induce the believing Jews to abandon their Judaic relationships. It is this last step however which he engages them to take; and the judgment was at hand. Until now they had linked Christianity with Judaism; there had been thousands of Christians who were very zealous for the law. But God was about to destroy that system altogether — already in fact judged by the Jews' rejection of Christ, and by their resistance to the testimony of the Holy Ghost. Our epistle engages believers to come forth entirely from that system and to bear the Lord's reproach, setting before them a new foundation for their relationship with God in a High Priest who is in the heavens. At the same time it links all that it says with the testimony of God by the prophets through the intermedium of Christ, the Son of God, speaking during His life on earth, though now speaking from heaven.

Thus the new position is plainly set forth, but continuity with the former is also established; and we have a glimpse, by means of the new covenant, of continuity also with that which is to come — a thread by which another state of things, the millennial state, is connected with the whole of God's dealings with the nation, although that which is taught and developed in the epistle is the position of believers (of the people), formed by the revelation of a heavenly Christ on whom depended all their connection with God. They were to come forth from the camp; but it was because Jesus, in order to sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. For here there is no continuing city: we seek one that is to come. The writer places himself among the remnant of the people as one of them. He teaches with the full light of the Holy Ghost, but not those to whom he had been sent as an apostle, with the apostolic authority which such a mission would have given him over them. It will be understood that in saying this we speak of the relationship of the writer, not of the inspiration of the writing.

While developing the sympathies of Christ and His sufferings, in order to show that He is able to compassionate the suffering and the tried, the epistle does not bring forward His humiliation nor the reproach of the cross, till quite at the end when — His glory having been set forth — the author engages the Jew to follow Him and to share His reproach.

The glory of the Messiah's Person, His sympathies, His heavenly glory, are made prominent in order to strengthen the faltering faith of the Jewish Christians, and to fortify them in their christian position, that they might view the latter in its true character; and that they themselves, being connected with heaven and established in their heavenly calling, might learn to bear the cross and to separate themselves from the religion of the flesh, and not draw back to a Judaism just ready to pass away.

We must look then in this epistle for the character of relationships with God, formed upon the revelation of the Messiah in the position which He had taken on high, and not for the doctrine of a new nature; approach to God in the holiest, impossible in Judaism, but no revelation of the Father, nor union with Christ on high.

He is speaking to persons who were familiar with the privileges of the fathers.

God had spoken to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways; and now, at the end of those days, that is to say, at the end of the days of the Israelite dispensation, in which the law ought to have been in vigor; at the end of the times during which God maintained relationship with Israel (sustaining them with a disobedient people by means of the prophets) at the end then of those days God had spoken in the Person of the Son. There is no breach to begin a wholly new system. The God who had spoken before by the prophets now went on to speak in Christ.

It was not only by inspiring holy men (as He had done before), that they might recall Israel to the law and announce the coming of the Messiah. Himself had spoken as the Son — in His] Son. We see at once that the writer connects the revelation made by Jesus\* of the thoughts of God, with the former words addressed to Israel by the prophets. God has spoken, he says, identifying himself with His people, to us, as He spake to our fathers by the prophets.

[\* We shall see that, while showing at the outset that the Subject of his discourse had seated Himself at the right hand of God, he speaks also of the communications of the Lord when on earth. But even here it is in contrast with Moses and the angels, as far more excellent. All has in view the deliverance of the believing Jews from Judaism.]

The Messiah had spoken, the Son of whom the scriptures had already testified. This gives occasion to lay open, according to the scriptures, the glory of this Messiah, of Jesus, with regard to His Person, and to the position He has taken.

And here we must always remember, that it is the Messiah of whom he is speaking — He who once spoke on the earth. He declares indeed His divine glory; but it is the glory of Him who has spoken which he declares, the glory of that Son who had appeared according to the promises made to Israel.

This glory is twofold, and in connection with the twofold office of Christ. It is the divine glory of the Person of the Messiah, the Son of God. The solemn authority of His word is connected with this glory. And then there is the glory with which His humanity is invested according to the counsels of God — the glory of the Son of man; a glory connected with His sufferings during His sojourn here below, which fitted Him for the exercise of a priesthood both merciful and intelligent with regard to the necessities and the trials of His people.

These two chapters are the foundation of all the doctrine of the epistle. In chapter 1 we find the divine glory of the Messiah's Person; in chapter 2:1-4 (which continues the subject), the authority of His word; and from 5-18 His glorious humanity. As Man, all things are put in subjection under Him; nevertheless, before being glorified, He took part in all the sufferings and in all the temptations to which the saints, whose nature He had assumed, are subjected. With this glory His priesthood is connected: He is able to succor them that are tempted, in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted. Thus He is the Apostle and the High Priest of the "called" people.

To this twofold glory is joined an accessory glory: He is Head, as Son, over God's house, possessing this authority as the One who created all things, even as Moses had authority as a servant in the house of God on earth. Now the believers, whom the inspired writer was addressing, were this house, if at least they held fast their confession of His name unto the end. For the danger of the Hebrew converts was that of losing their confidence, because there was nothing before their eyes as the fulfillment of the promises. Consequently exhortations follow (chap. 3:7 to 4:13)

which refer to the voice of the Lord, as carrying the word of God into the midst of the people, in order that they might not harden their hearts.

From chapter 4:14 the subject of the priesthood is treated, leading to the value of the sacrifice of Christ, but introducing also the two covenants in passing, and insisting on the change of the law necessarily consequent upon the change of priesthood. Then comes the value of the sacrifice very fully in contrast with the figures that accompanied the old; and on which, and on the blood which was shed in them, the covenant itself was founded. This instruction on the priesthood continues to the end of verse 18 in chapter 10. The exhortations founded thereon introduce the principle of the endurance of faith, which leads to chapter 11, in which the cloud of witnesses is reviewed, crowning them with the example of Christ Himself, who completed the whole career of faith in spite of every obstacle, and who shows us where this painful but glorious path terminates (chap. 12:2).

From chapter 12:3 he enters more closely into the trials found in the path of faith, and gives the most solemn warning with regard to the danger of those who draw back, and the most precious encouragements to those who persevere in it, setting forth the relationship into which we are brought by grace: and finally in chapter 13 he exhorts the faithful Hebrews on several points of detail, and in particular on that of unreservedly taking the christian position under the cross, laying stress on the fact that Christians alone had the true worship of God, and that they who chose to persevere in Judaism had no right to take part in it. In a word, he would have them to separate themselves definitely from a Judaism which was already judged, and to lay hold of the heavenly calling, bearing the cross here below. It was now a heavenly calling, and the path a path of faith.

Such is the summary of our epistle. We return now to the study of its chapters in detail.

**CHAPTER 1.** We have said that in chapter 1 we find the glory of the Person of the Messiah, the Son of God, by whom God has spoken to the people. When I say “to the people,” it is evident that we understand the epistle to be addressed to the believing remnant, partakers, it is said, of the heavenly calling, but considered as alone holding the true place of the people.

It is a distinction given to the remnant, in view of the position which the Messiah took in connection with His people, to whom in the first instance He came. The tried and despised remnant, viewed as alone really having their place, are encouraged, and their faith is sustained by the true glory of their Messiah, hidden from their natural eyes, and the object of faith only.

“God” (says the inspired writer, placing himself among the believers of the beloved nation), “has spoken to us in the person of his Son.” Psalm 2 should have led the Jews to expect the Son, and they ought to have formed a high idea of His glory from Isaiah 9, and other scriptures, which in fact were applied to the Messiah by their teachers, as the rabbinical writings still prove. But that He should be in heaven, and not have raised His people to the possession of earthly glory — this did not suit the carnal state of their hearts.

Now it is heavenly glory, this true position of the Messiah and His people, in connection with His divine right to their attention and to the worship of the angels themselves, which is so admirably presented here, where the Spirit of God brings out, in so infinitely precious a manner, the divine glory of Christ, for the purpose of exhorting His people to belief in a heavenly position; at the same time setting forth in what follows His perfect sympathy with us, as Man, in order to maintain their communion with heaven in spite of the difficulties of their path on earth.

Thus, although the assembly is not found in the epistle to the Hebrews, save in an allusion to all comprised in the millennial glory in chapter 12, the Savior of the assembly is there presented in His Person, His work, and His priesthood, most richly to our hearts and to our spiritual intelligence; and the heavenly calling is in itself very particularly developed.

It is also most interesting to see the way in which the work of our Savior, accomplished for us, forms a part of the manifestation of His divine glory.

“God has spoken in the Son,” says the inspired author of our epistle. He is then this Son. First He is declared Heir of all things. It is He who is to possess gloriously as Son everything that exists. Such are the decrees of God. Moreover it is by Him that God created the worlds.\* All the vast system of this universe, those unknown worlds that trace their paths in the vast regions of space in divine order to manifest the glory of a

Creator-God, are the work of His hand who has spoken to us, of the divine Christ.

[\* A particular interpretation has, by some, been given to the word translated "worlds"; but it is certain that the word is used by the LB (that is, in the Hellenistic or scriptural Greek) for the physical worlds.]

In Him has shone forth the glory of God: He is the perfect impress of His being. We see God in Him, in all that He said, in all that He did, in His Person. Moreover by the power of His word He upholds all that exists. He is then the Creator. God is revealed in His Person. He sustains all things by His word, which has thus a divine power. But this is not all (for we are still speaking of the Christ); there is another part of His glory, divine indeed, yet manifested in human nature. He who was all this which we have just seen, when He had by Himself (accomplishing His own glory,\* and for His glory) wrought the purification of our sins, seated Himself at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Here is in full the personal glory of Christ. He is in fact the Creator, the revelation of God, the upholder of all things by His word, He is the Redeemer. He has by Himself purged our sins; has seated Himself at the right hand of the Majesty on high. It is the Messiah who is all this. He is the Creator-God, but He is a Messiah who has taken His place in the heavens at the right hand of Majesty, having accomplished the purification of our sins. We perceive how this exhibition of the glory of Christ, the Messiah, whether personal or that of position, would bring whoever believed in it out of Judaism, while linking itself with the Jewish promises and hopes. He is God, He has come down from heaven, He has gone up thither again.

[\* The Greek verb has here a peculiar form, which gives it a reflective sense, causing the thing done to return into the doer, throwing back the glory of the thing done upon the one who did it.]

Now those who attached themselves to Him found themselves, in another respect also, above the Jewish system. That system was ordained in connection with angels; but Christ has taken a position much higher than that of angels, because He has for His own proper inheritance a name (that is, a revelation of what He is) which is much more excellent than that of angels. Upon this the author of this epistle quotes several passages from the Old Testament which speak of the Messiah, in order to show that which He is in contrast with the nature and the relative position of angels.

The significance of these passages to a converted Jew is evident, and we readily perceive the adaptation of the argument to such, for the Jewish economy was under the administration of angels, according to their own belief — a belief fully grounded on the word.\* And, at the same time, it was their own scriptures which proved that the Messiah was to have a position much more excellent and exalted than that of angels, according to the rights that belonged to Him by virtue of His nature, and according to the counsels and the revelation of God: so that they who united themselves to Him were brought into connection with that which entirely eclipsed the law and all that related to it, and to the Jewish economy which could not be separated from it, and whose glory was angelic in character. The glory of Christianity — and he speaks to those who acknowledged Jesus to be the Christ — was so much above the glory of the law, that the two could not be really united.

[\* See Psalm 68:17, Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19.]

The quotations begin by that from Psalm 2. God, it is written, has never said to any of the angels, “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” It is this character of Sonship, proper to the Messiah, which, as a real relationship, distinguishes Him. He was from eternity the Son of the Father; but it is not precisely in this point of view that He is here considered. The name expresses the same relationship, but it is to the Messiah born on earth that this title is here applied. For Psalm 2, as establishing Him as King in Zion, announces the decree which proclaims His title. “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee,” is His relationship in time, with God. It depends, I doubt not, on His glorious nature; but this position for man was acquired by the miraculous birth of Jesus here below, and demonstrated as true and determined in its true import by His resurrection. In Psalm 2 the testimony born to this relationship is in connection with His kingship in Zion, but it declares the personal glories of the King acknowledged of God. By virtue of the rights connected with this title, all kings are summoned to submit themselves to Him. This Psalm then is speaking of the government of the world, when God establishes the Messiah as King of Zion, and not of the gospel. But in the passage quoted (Hebrews 1:5), it is the relationship of glory in which He subsists with God, the foundation of His rights, which is set forth, and not the royal rights themselves.



This is likewise the case in the next quotation: “I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son.” Here we plainly see that it is the relationship in which He is with God, in which God accepts and owns Him, and not His eternal relationship with the Father: “I will be to him a Father,” etc. Thus it is still the Messiah, the King of Zion, the Son of David, for these words are applied in the first place to Solomon, as the son of David (2 Samuel 7:14 and 1 Chronicles 17:13). In this second passage the application of the expression to the true Son of David is more distinct. A relationship so intimate (expressed, one may say, with so much affection) was not the portion of angels. The Son of God, acknowledged to be so by God Himself — this is the portion of the Messiah in connection with God. The Messiah then is the Son of God in an altogether peculiar way, which could not be applied to angels.

But still more: when God introduces the Firstborn into the world, all the angels are called to worship Him. God presents Him to the world; but the highest of created beings must then cast themselves at His feet. The angels of God Himself — the creatures that are nearest to Him — must do homage to the Firstborn. This last expression also is remarkable. The Firstborn is the Heir, the beginning of the manifestation of the glory and power of God. It is in this sense that the word is used. It is said of the Son of David, “I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth” (Psa. 89:27), Thus the Messiah is introduced into the world as holding this place with regard to God Himself. He is the Firstborn — the immediate expression of the rights and the glory of God. He has universal pre-eminence.

Such is, so to speak, the positional glory of the Messiah. Not only Head of the people on earth, as Son of David, nor even only the acknowledged Son of God on the earth, according to Psalm 2, but the universal Firstborn; so that the chief and most exalted of creatures, those nearest to God, the angels of God, the instruments of His power and government, must do homage to the Son in this His position.

Yet this is far from being all; and this homage itself would be out of place if His glory were not proper to Himself and personal, if it were not connected with His nature. Nevertheless that which we have before us in this chapter is still the Messiah as owned of God. God tells us what He is.

Of the angels He says, “He maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.” He does not make His Son anything: He recognises that which He is, saying, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.” The Messiah may have an earthly throne (which also is not taken from Him, but which ceases by His taking possession of an eternal throne), but He has a throne which is for ever and ever.

The sceptre of His throne, as Messiah, is a sceptre of righteousness. Also He has, when here below, personally loved righteousness and hated iniquity: therefore God has anointed Him with the oil of gladness above His fellows. These companions are the believing remnant of Israel, whom He has made by grace His fellows, although (perfectly well-pleasing to God by His love of righteousness — and that, at all costs) He is exalted above them all. This is a remarkable passage, because, while on the one hand the divinity of the Lord is fully established as well as His eternal throne, on the other hand the passage comes down to His character as the faithful man on earth, where He made pious men the little remnant of Israel who waited for redemption, His companions; at the same time it gives Him (and it could not be otherwise) a place above them.

The text then returns to the glory given Him as Man, having the pre-eminence here as in all things.

I have already remarked elsewhere that while, as we read in Zechariah, Jehovah recognises as His fellow the humbled Man, against whom His sword awakes to smite; here, where the divinity of Jesus is set forth, the same Jehovah owns the poor remnant of believers as the fellows of the divine Savior. Marvellous links between God and His people!

Already then in these remarkable testimonies He has the eternal throne and the sceptre of righteousness: He is recognised as God although a Man, and glorified above all others as the reward of righteousness.

But the declaration of His divinity, the divinity of the Messiah, must be more precise. And the testimony is of the greatest beauty. The Psalm that contains it is one of the most complete expressions we find in scripture of the sense which Jesus had of His humiliation on earth, of His dependence on Jehovah, and that, having been raised up as Messiah from among men, He was cast down and His days shortened. If Zion were re-built (and the

Psalm speaks prophetically of the time when it shall take place), where would He be, Messiah as He was, if, weakened and humbled, He was cut off in the midst of His days (as was the case)? In a word, it is the prophetic expression of the Savior's heart in the prospect of that which happened to Him as a Man on the earth, the utterance of His heart to Jehovah, in those days of humiliation, in presence of the renewed affection of the remnant for the dust of Zionan affection which the Lord had produced in their hearts, and which was therefore a token of His goodwill and His purpose to re-establish it. But how could a Savior who was cut off have part in it? (a searching question for a believing Jew, tempted on that side). The words here quoted are the answer to this question. Humbled as He might be, He was the Creator Himself. He was ever the same;\* His years could never fail. It was He who had founded the heavens: He would fold them up as a garment, but He Himself would never change.

[\* The words translated, "Thou art the same," (Atta Hu) are by many learned Hebraists taken — at least Huas a name of God. At any rate, as unchangeably the same, it amounts to it. The not failing years are endless duration when become a man.]

Such then is the testimony rendered to the Messiah by the scriptures of the Jews themselves — the glory of His position above the angels who administered the dispensation of the law; His eternal throne of righteousness; His unchangeable divinity as Creator of all things.

One thing remained to complete this chain of glory — that is, the place occupied at present by Christ, in contrast still with the angels (a place that depends, on the one hand, upon the divine glory of His Person; on the other, upon the accomplishment of His work). And this place is at the right hand of God, who called Him to sit there until He had made His enemies His footstool. Not only in His Person glorious and divine, not only does He hold the first place with regard to all creatures in the universe (we have spoken of this, which will take place when He is introduced into the world), but He has His own place at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. To which of the angels has God ever said this? They are servants on God's part to the heirs of salvation.

**CHAPTER 2.** This is the reason why it is so much the more needful to hearken to the word spoken, in order that they should not let it pass away from life and memory.

God had maintained the authority of the word that was communicated by means of angels, punishing disobedience to it, for it was a law. How then shall we escape if we neglect a salvation which the Lord Himself has announced? Thus the service of the Lord among the Jews was a word of salvation, which the apostles confirmed, and which the mighty testimony of the Holy Ghost established.

Such is the exhortation addressed to the believing Jews, founded on the glory of the Messiah, whether with regard to His position or His Person, calling them away from what was Jewish to higher thoughts of Christ.

We have already remarked that the testimony of which this epistle treats, is attributed to the Lord Himself. Therefore we must not expect to find in it the assembly (as such), of which the Lord had only spoken prophetically; but His testimony in relation to Israel, among whom He sojourned on the earth, to whatever extent that testimony reached. That which was spoken by the apostles is only treated here as a confirmation of the Lord's own word, God having added His testimony to it by the miraculous manifestations of the Spirit, who distributed His gifts to each according to His will.

The glory of which we have been speaking is the personal glory of the Messiah, the Son of David; and His glory in the time present, during which God has called Him to sit at His right hand. He is the Son of God, He is even the Creator; but there is also His glory in connection with the world to come, as Son of man. Of this chapter 2 speaks, comparing Him still with the angels; but here to exclude them altogether. In the previous chapter they had their place: the law was given by angels; they are servants, on God's part, of the heirs of salvation. In chapter 2 they have no place, they do not reign; the world to come is not made subject to them — that is, this habitable earth, directed and governed as it will be when God shall have accomplished that which He has spoken of by the prophets.

The order of the world, placed in relationship with Jehovah under the law, or "lying in darkness," has been interrupted by the rejection of the Messiah, who has taken His place at the right hand of God on high, His enemies being not yet given into His hand for judgment, because God is carrying on His work of grace, and gathering out the assembly. But He will

yet establish a new order of things on the earth; this will be “the world to come.” Now that world is not made subject to angels. The testimony given in the Old Testament with regard to this is as follows: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him; or the son of man that thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels; thou hast crowned him with glory and honor; thou hast set him over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.” Thus all things without exception (save He who has made them subject to Him), are, according to the purpose of God, put under the feet of man, and in particular of the Son of man.

When studying the Book of Psalms, we saw that which I recall here, namely, that this testimony in Psalm 8 is, with regard to the position and dominion of Christ as man, an advance upon Psalm 2. Psalm 1 sets before us the righteous man, accepted of God, the godly remnant with which Christ connected Himself; Psalm 2, the counsels of God respecting His Messiah, in spite of the efforts made by the kings and governors of the earth. God establishes Him as King in Zion, and summons all the kings to do homage to Him whom He proclaimed to be His Son on the earth. Afterwards we see that being rejected the remnant suffer, and this Psalm 2 is what Peter quotes to prove the rising up of the powers of the earth, Jewish and Gentile, against Messiah (Acts 4:25). But Psalm 8 shows that all this only served to enlarge the sphere of His glory. Christ takes the position of man and the title of Son of man, and enjoys His rights according to the counsels of God; and, made lower than the angels, He is crowned with glory and honor. And not only are the kings of the earth made subject to Him, but all things, without exception, are put under His feet.\* It is this which the apostle quotes here. The Christ had already been rejected, and His being established as King in Zion put off to be accomplished at a later period. He had been exalted to the right hand of God, as we have seen; and the wider title had accrued to Him, although the result was not yet accomplished.

[\* Compare the answer of Christ to Nathanael at the end of John 1; also Matthew 17 and Luke 9, where the disciples are forbidden to announce Him as the Christ, and He declares He is about to suffer as Son of man, but shows them the coming glory.]

To this the epistle here calls our attention. We see not yet the accomplishment of all that this Psalm announces, namely, that all things

should be put under His feet; but a part is already fulfilled, a guarantee to the heart of the fulfillment of the whole. Made a little lower than the angels in order to suffer death, He is crowned with glory and honor. He has suffered death, and He is crowned in reward for His work, by which He perfectly glorified God in the place where He had been dishonored, and saved man (those who believe in Him) where man was lost. For He was made lower than the angels, in order that, by the grace of God, He should taste death for all things. It appears to me that the words “for the suffering of death,” and “a little lower than the angels” go together; and “so that by the grace of God” is a general phrase connected with the whole truth stated.

This passage then, which is thus applied to the Lord, presents Him as exalted to heaven when He had undergone the death which gave Him a right to all in a new way while waiting till all is put under His feet. But there is another truth connected with this. He had undertaken the cause of the sons whom God is bringing to glory, and therefore He must enter into the circumstances in which they were found, suffer the consequences thereof, and be treated according to the work He had undertaken. It was a reality; and it was fitting that God should vindicate the rights of His glory, and should maintain it with reference to those who had dishonored Him, and that He should treat the One who had taken their cause in hand, and who stood before Him in their name, as representing them in that respect. God would bring the captain of their salvation to perfection through sufferings. He was to undergo the consequences of the situation into which He had come. His work was to be a reality, according to the measure of the responsibility which He had taken upon Himself, and it involved the glory of God where sin was. He must therefore suffer; He must taste death. It is by the grace of God that He did so — we, because of sin; He, because of grace for sin.

This shows us the Christ standing in the midst of those who are saved, whom God brings to glory, although at their head. It is this which our epistle sets before us — He who sanctifies (the Christ), and they who are sanctified (the remnant set apart for God by the Spirit) are all of one: an expression, the force of which is easily apprehended, but difficult to express, when one abandons the abstract nature of the phrase itself. Observe that it is only of sanctified persons that this is said. Christ and

the sanctified ones are all one company, men together in the same position before God. But the idea goes a little farther.

It is not of one and the same Father; had it been so, it could not have been said, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." He could not then do otherwise than call them brethren.

If we say "of the same mass" the expression may be pushed too far, as though He and the others were of the same nature as children of Adam, sinners together. In this case He would have to call every man His brother; whereas it is only the children whom God has given Him, "sanctified" ones, that He so calls. But He and the sanctified ones are all as men in the same nature and position together before God. When I say "the same," it is not in the same state of sin, but the contrary, for they are the Sanctifier and the sanctified, but in the same truth of human position as it is before God as sanctified to Him; the same as far forth as man when He, as the sanctified one, is before God. On this account He is not ashamed to call the sanctified His brethren.

This position is entirely gained by resurrection; for although, in principle, the children were given to Him before, yet He only called them His brethren when He had finished the work which enabled Him to present them with Himself before God. He said indeed "mother, sister, brother"; but He did not use the term "my brethren," as in John 20] until He said to Mary of Magdala, "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." Also in Psalm 22 it is when He had been heard from the horns of the unicorn, that He declared the name of a Deliverer-God to His brethren, and that He praised God in the midst of the assembly.

He spoke to them of the Father's name while on earth, but the link itself could not be formed; He could not introduce them to the Father, until the grain of wheat, falling into the ground, had died; until then He remained alone, whatever might be the revelations that He made to them; and in fact, He declared the name of His Father to those whom He had given Him. Still He had actually taken the human position, and He Himself was in this relationship with God. He kept them in the Father's name, they were not yet united to Him in this position; but He was as man in the relationship with God in which they also should be, when brought in by redemption

into association with Himself. That which He does in the latter part of the Gospel by John is to place His disciples — in the explanations He gave of the condition in which He left them — in the position which He in fact had held in relationship with His Father on earth, and in testimony to the world, the glory of His Person as representing and revealing His Father being necessarily distinct. And, in seeking to associate with them, He associated them with Himself and Himself with them when He ascended to heaven, although no longer corporeally subject to the trials of their position.\*

[\* This however in relationship with God. They did not represent nor make known the Father as He did. Also, while we are brought into the same glory with Christ and the same relationship with the Father, the personal glory of Christ as Son is always carefully secured. It has been justly remarked to the same purpose by another, that He never says “our” Father with the disciples. He tells them to say “our,” but says “my and your,” and it is much more precious.]

He was not ashamed then to call them brethren, saying, though risen, yea, only when risen, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, I will praise thee in the midst of the assembly.” And speaking of the remnant separated from Israel, He says, “Behold I and the children whom God hath given me are for signs unto the two houses of Israel”; and again, “I will put my trust in him” — another quotation from Isaiah 8. So in the Psalms, especially in Psalm 16, He declares that He does not take His place as God — “my goodness extendeth not to thee,” but that He identifies Himself with the excellent of the earth — that all His delight is in them. This is again the remnant of Israel called by grace.

Christ associates these sanctified men, godly men on earth, with Himself. In the passage quoted it is still His place on earth; His sufferings, His exaltation, future glory, divinity are, as we have seen, added here.

Having taken this place as of, but at the head of, the chosen band — their servant in all things, He must conform Himself to their position. And this He did: the children being partakers of flesh and blood, He took part in the same; and this, in order that by death He might put an end to the dominion of him who had the power of death, and deliver those who, through fear of death, had been subjected all their life to the yoke of bondage.



Here also (the apostle seeking always to display the glorious and efficacious side, even of that which was most humbling, in order to accustom the weak heart of the Jews to that portion of the Gospel) we find that the Lord's work goes far beyond the limits of a presentation of the Messiah to His people. Not only is He glorious in heaven, but He has conquered Satan in the very place where he exercised his sad dominion over man, and where the judgment of God lay heavily upon man.

Moved by a profound love for man, the Son — become the Son of man — enters in heart and in fact into all the need, and submits to all the circumstances, of man in order to deliver him. He takes (for He was not in it before) flesh and blood, in order to die, because man was subjected to death; and (in order to destroy him who exercised his dominion over man through death, and made him tremble all his lifetime in the expectation of that terrible moment, which testified of the judgment of God and the inability of man to escape the consequences of sin) the condition into which disobedience to God had plunged him. For verily the Lord did not undertake the cause of angels, but that of the seed of Abraham, and in order to proclaim the work that was necessary for them, and to represent them efficaciously and really before God, He must needs put Himself into the position and the circumstances in which that seed were found though not the state they were personally in.

It will be remarked here, that it is still a family owned of God, which is before our eyes, as the object of the Savior's affection and care — the children whom God had given Him children of Abraham after the flesh, if in that condition they answered to the designation of "seed of Abraham" (this is the question of John 8:37-39), or his children according to the Spirit, if grace gives it them.

These truths introduce priesthood. As Son of man, He had been made a little less than the angels, and, crowned already with glory and honor, was hereafter to have all things put under His feet. This we do not yet see. But He took this place of humiliation in order to taste death for the whole system that was afar from God, and to gain the full rights of the second Man, by glorifying God there, where the creature had failed through weakness, and where also the enemy, having deceived man by his subtlety, had dominion over him (according to the righteous judgment of God) in

power and malice. At the same time he tasted death for the special purpose of delivering the children whom God would bring to glory, taking their nature and gathering them together as sanctified ones around Himself, He not being ashamed to call them brethren. But it was thus that He was to present them now before God, according to the efficacy of the work which He had accomplished for them; He would become a priest, being able through His life of humiliation and trial here below, to sympathise with His own in all their conflicts and difficulties.

He suffered — never yielded. We do not suffer when we yield to temptation: the flesh takes pleasure in the things by which it is tempted. Jesus suffered, being tempted, and He is able to succor them that are tempted. It is important to observe that the flesh, when acted upon by its desires, does not suffer. Being tempted, it, alas! enjoys. But when, according to the light of the Holy Ghost and the fidelity of obedience, the Spirit resists the attacks of the enemy, whether subtle or persecuting, then one suffers. This the Lord did, and this we have to do. That which needs succor is the new man, the faithful heart, and not the flesh. I need succor against the flesh, and in order to mortify all the members of the old man.

Here the needed help refers to the difficulties of the faithful saint in fulfilling all the will of God. This is where he suffers, this is where the Lord — who has suffered — can succor him. He trod this path, He learnt in it that which can be suffered there from the enemy, and from men. A human heart feels it, and Jesus had a human heart. Besides, the more faithful the heart is, the more full of love to God, and the less it has of that hardness which is the result of intercourse with the world, the more will it suffer. Now there was no hardness in Jesus. His faithfulness and His love were equally perfect. He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief and weariness. He suffered being tempted.\*

[\* Four distinct grounds may be noticed in the chapter for the humiliation of Jesus: it became God — there was His glory; the destruction of Satan's power; reconciliation or really propitiation by His death; and capacity for sympathy in priesthood.]

**CHAPTER 3.** Thus the Lord is set before us as the Apostle and High Priest of believers from among the Jews, the true people. I say, “from among the Jews,” not that He is not our Priest, but that here the sacred writer places himself among the believing Jews, saying “our”; and, instead of speaking of

himself as an apostle, he points out Jesus as the Apostle; which He was in Person among the Jews. In principle, it is true of all believers. That which He has said is the Lord's word, and He is able to succor us when we are tempted. We are His house.

For we have here a third character of Christ. He is a "Son over his house." Moses was faithful in all the house of God as a servant, in testimony to the things that were afterwards to be proclaimed. But Christ is over God's house; but it is not as a servant but as a Son. He has built the house. He is God.

Moses identified himself with the house, faithful therein in all things. But Christ is more excellent; even as he who builds the house is more excellent than the house. But He who builds all things is God. And this is what Christ did. For in fact the house (that is, the tabernacle in the wilderness) was a figure of the universe; and Christ passed through the heavens, as the high priest passed into the sanctuary. All was cleansed with blood, even as God will reconcile all things by Christ in the heavens and on the earth. In a certain sense this universe is the house of God. He deigns to inhabit it. Christ created it all. But there is a house which is more properly His own. We are His house, taking it for granted that we persevere to the end.

The Hebrew Christians were in danger — being attracted by their former habits, and by a law and ceremonies which God Himself had established — of forsaking a Christianity, in which Christ was not visible, for things that were visible and palpable. The Christ of Christians, far from being a crown of glory to the people, was only an object of faith, so that, if faith failed, He was deprived of all importance to them. A religion that made itself seen (the "old wine") naturally attracted those that had been accustomed to it.

But in fact Christ was much more excellent than Moses; as he who has built the house had more honor than the house. Now this house was the figure of all things, and He who had built them was God. The passage gives us this view of Christ and of the house, and also says, that we are this house. And Christ is not the servant here; He is the Son over God's house.

We must always remember that which has been already remarked, namely, that in this epistle we have not the assembly as the body of Christ in union with Himself; nor even the Father either, except as a comparison in

chapter 12. It is God, a heavenly Christ (who is the Son of God), and a people, the Messiah being a heavenly Mediator between the people and God. Therefore the proper privileges of the assembly are not found in this epistle — they flow from our union with Christ; and here Christ is a Person apart, who is between us and God, on high while we are here.

There are still a few remarks which we may add here in order to throw light on this point, and to assist the reader in understanding the first two chapters, as well as the principle of the instructions throughout the epistle.

In **CHAPTER 1** Christ accomplishes by Himself as a part of His divine glory the purification of sins, and seats Himself at the right hand of God. This work, observe, is done by Himself. We have nothing to do with it, save to believe in and enjoy it. It is a divine work which this divine Person has accomplished by Himself; so that it has all the absolute perfection, all the force, of a work done by Him, without any mixture of our weakness, of our efforts, or of our experiences. He performed it by Himself, and it is accomplished. Thereupon He takes His seat. He is not placed there — He seats Himself upon the throne on high.

In **CHAPTER 2** we see another point which characterises the epistle — the present state of the glorified Man. He is crowned with glory and honor; but it is with a view to an order of things which is not yet accomplished. It is the Person of the Man Christ which is presented, not the assembly in union with Him, even when He is beheld as glorified in the heavens. This glory is viewed as a partial accomplishment of that which belongs to Him, according to the counsels of God, as the Son of man. Hereafter this glory will be complete in all its parts by the subjugation of all things.

The present glory therefore of Christ makes us look forward to an order of things yet future, which will be full rest, full blessing. In a word, besides the perfection of His work, the epistle sets before us the sequel of that which belongs to the Christ in Person, the Son of man, not the perfection of the assembly in Him. And this embraces the present time, the character of which, to the believer, depends on Christ's being now glorified in heaven while waiting for a future state, in which all things will be subjected to Him.

In this chapter 2 we see also that He is crowned. He is not seen sitting there as in His own original right, though He had that glory before the world was, but, having been made a little less than the angels, God crowns Him. We also plainly see that although the believing Hebrews are especially in view, and even all Christians are classed under the title of Abraham's seed on the earth, yet that Christ is viewed nevertheless as the Son of man, and not as the Son of David; and the question is put, "What is man?" The answer (the precious answer for us) is, Christ glorified, once dead on account of man's condition. In Him we see the mind of God with regard to man.

The fact that Christians themselves are viewed as the seed of Abraham plainly shows the way in which they are considered as forming part of the chain of the heirs of promise on earth (as in Romans 11), and not as the assembly united to Christ as His body in heaven.

The work is perfect; it is the work of God. He has by Himself made purification of sins. The full result of the counsels of God with regard to the Son of man is not yet come. Thus the earthly part can be brought in, as a thing foreseen, as well as the heavenly part, although the persons to whom the epistle is addressed had part in the heavenly glory — participated in the heavenly calling — in connection with the present position of the Son of man.

The remnant of the Jews, as we have said, are considered as continuing the chain of the people blessed on earth, whatever heavenly privileges they may also possess or whatever their especial state may be in connection with the Messiah's exaltation to heaven. We have been grafted into the good olive-tree, so that we share all the advantages here spoken of. Our highest position, and the privileges belonging to it, are not here in view. Accordingly, as writing to Hebrews and as one among them, he addresses them, that is to say, Christians and believing Israelites. This is the force of the word "us" in the epistle; we must bear it in mind, and that the Hebrew believers always form the word "us," of which the writer is also a part.

As I have said, we rightly appropriate it to ourselves in principle; but to have a clear view of his meaning, we must put ourselves at the point of view which the Spirit of God has taken.

No one ought to harden his heart; but this word is especially addressed to Israel, and that until the day when Christ shall appear. In speaking of it, the author returns to the word that had formerly been addressed to Israel; not now in order to warn them of the danger they would incur by neglecting it, but of the consequences of departing from that which they had acknowledged to be true. Israel, when delivered out of Egypt, had provoked God in the wilderness (it was indeed the case also of Christians in this world), because they were not at once, and without difficulty, in Canaan. Those to whom he wrote were in danger of forsaking the living God in the same way; that is, the danger was there before their eyes. They should rather exhort each other, while it was still called today, in order that they might not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. This word “today” is the expression of the patient activity of God’s grace towards Israel even unto the end. The people were unbelieving; they have hardened their hearts; they have done so, and will alas! do so to the end, until judgment come in the Person of the Messiah-Jehovah, whom they have despised. But until then God loves to reiterate, “Today, if ye will hear my voice.” It may be that only a few will hearken; it may be that the nation is judicially hardened, in order to admit the Gentiles; but the word “today” still resounds for every one among them who has ears to hear, until the Lord shall appear in judgment. It is addressed to the people according to the longsuffering of God. For the remnant who had believed it was an especial warning not to walk in the ways of the hardened people who had refused to hearken — not to turn back to them, forsaking their own confidence in the word which had called them, as Israel did in the wilderness.

As long as the “today” of the call of grace should continue, they were to exhort one another, lest unbelief should glide into their hearts through the subtlety of sin. It is thus that the living God is forsaken. We speak thus practically, not with reference to the faithfulness of God, who certainly will not allow any of His own to perish, but with regard to practical danger, and to that which would draw us away — as to our responsibility — from God, and for ever, if God did not intervene, acting in the life which He has given us, and which never perishes.

Sin separates us from God in our thoughts; we have no longer the same sense either of His love, His power, or His interest in us. Confidence is lost. Hope, and the value of unseen things, diminish; while the value of

things that are seen proportionately increases. The conscience is bad; one is not at ease with God. The path is hard and difficult; the will strengthens itself against Him. We no longer live by faith; visible things come in between us and God, and take possession of the heart. Where there is life, God warns by His Spirit (as in this epistle), He chastises and restores. Where it was only an outward influence, a faith devoid of life, and the conscience not reached, it is abandoned.

It is the warning against so doing that arrests the living. The dead — they whose consciences are not engaged, who do not say, “To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” — despise the warning and perish. This was the case with Israel in the wilderness, and God swear unto them that they should not enter into His rest (Numbers 14:21-23). And why? They had given up their confidence in Him. Their unbelief — when the beauty and excellence of the land had been reported to them — deprived them of the promised rest.

The position of the believers to whom this epistle is addressed was the same as this, although in connection with better promises. The beauty and excellence of the heavenly Canaan had been proclaimed to them. They had, by the Spirit, seen and tasted its fruits; they were in the wilderness; they had to persevere to maintain their confidence unto the end.

Observe here — for Satan, and our own conscience when it has not been set free, often make use of this epistle — that doubting Christians are not here contemplated, or persons who have not yet gained entire confidence in God: to those who are in this condition its exhortations and warnings have no application. These exhortations are to preserve the Christian in a confidence which he has, and to persevere, not to tranquillise fears and doubts. This use of the epistle to sanction such doubts is but a device of the enemy. Only I would add here that, although the full knowledge of grace (which in such a case the soul has assuredly not yet attained) is the only thing that can deliver and set it free from its fears, yet it is very important in this case practically to maintain a good conscience, in order not to furnish the enemy with a special means of attack.

**CHAPTER 4.** The apostle goes on to apply this part of Israel’s history to those whom he was addressing, laying stress on two points: 1st, That Israel had failed of entering into rest through unbelief; 2nd, That the rest

was yet to come, and that believers (those who were not seeking rest here, but who accepted the wilderness for the time being) should enter into it.

He begins by saying, "Let us fear lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any should seem to come short of it," not attain to it. For we have been the objects of the proclamation of glad tidings, as they were in times past. But the word addressed to them remained fruitless, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it: for we which have believed do enter into rest. The rest itself is yet to come, and it is believers who enter into it. For a rest of God there is, and there are some who enter into it: inasmuch as it is written, "They," that is, those (pointing out a certain class who are to be excluded) "shall not enter into my rest."

God had wrought in creation, and then rested from His works when He had finished them. Thus, from the foundation of the world, He has shown that He had a rest, as in the passage already quoted, "If they shall enter into my rest"; but this, showing that the entering in was yet in question, showed that into God's rest in the first creation man had not entered. Two things then are evident — some were to enter in, and the Israel to whom it was first proposed did not enter in because of their unbelief. Therefore He again fixes a day, saying, in David, long after the entrance into Canaan, "Today — as it is written — today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

Here a natural objection occurs to which the passage gives a complete answer, without speaking of the objection itself. The Israelites had indeed fallen in the wilderness, but Joshua had brought the people into Canaan which the unbelievers never reached; the Jews were there, so that they did enter into the rest as to which the others failed. The answer is evident. It was long after this that God said by David, "I swear in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest." If Joshua had given rest to Israel, David could not afterwards have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. It is yet to come; but it is assured by the word of God — a truth, the bearing of which is immediately seen with regard to the connection of the believing Jews with the nation, in the midst of which they were tempted to seek a rest that, for the moment, faith did not afford them, and being enfeebled saw but dimly before it. To have God's rest one must persevere in faith. Present apparent rest was not the true rest. God's



rest was still to be waited for. Faith alone acknowledged this, and sought for none in the wilderness, trusting to the promise. God still said "Today."

The state of the people was worse than the rest that Joshua gave them; which, as their own Psalms prove, was no rest at all.

As to the order of the verses, the exhortation in verse 11 depends on the whole course of what precedes, the argument having been completed by the testimony of David coming after Joshua. After the creation God indeed rested; but He said after that, "If they shall enter into my rest." So that men had not entered into that rest. Joshua entered into the land; but the word by David, coming long after, proves that the rest of God was not yet attained. Nevertheless this same testimony, which forbade the entrance into rest because of unbelief, showed that some are to enter in: otherwise there was no need of declaring the exclusion of others for an especial cause, nor warning men that they might escape what hindered their entering in. No parenthesis is needed.

Now, as long as any one had not ceased from his works, he had not entered into rest; he who has entered into it has ceased from work, even as God ceased from His own works when He entered into His rest. "Let us therefore use diligence" is the exhortation of the faithful witness of God, "that we may enter into that rest" — the rest of God — in order that we may not fall after the same example of unbelief.

We should especially observe here, that it is the rest of God which is spoken of. This enables us to understand the happiness and perfection of the rest. God must rest in that which satisfies His heart. This was the case even in creation — all was very good. And now it must be in a perfect blessing that perfect love can be satisfied with, with regard to us, who will possess a heavenly portion in the blessing which we shall have in His own presence, in perfect holiness and perfect light. Accordingly all the toilsome work of faith, the exercise of faith in the wilderness, the warfare (although there are many joys), the good works practiced there, labor of every kind will cease. It is not only that we shall be delivered from the power of indwelling sin; all the efforts and all the troubles of the new man will cease. We are already set free from the law of sin; then our spiritual exercise for God will cease. We shall rest from our works — not evil ones. We have already rested from our works with regard to justification, and therefore in

that sense we have now rest in our consciences; but that is not the subject here — it is the Christian's rest from all his works. God rested from His works — assuredly good ones — and so shall we also then with Him.

We are now in the wilderness; we also wrestle with wicked spirits in heavenly places. A blessed rest remains for us, in which our hearts will repose in the presence of God, where nothing will trouble the perfection of our rest, where God will rest in the perfection of the blessing He has bestowed on His people.

The great thought of the passage is, that there remains a rest (that is to say, that the believer is not to expect it here) without saying where it is. And it does not speak in detail of the character of the rest, because it leaves the door open to an earthly rest for the earthly people on the ground of the promises, although to christian partakers of the heavenly calling God's rest is evidently a heavenly one.

The apostle then sets before us the instrument which God employs to judge the unbelief and all the workings of the heart which tend, as we have seen, to lead the believer into departure from the position of faith, and to hide God from him by inducing him to satisfy his flesh and to seek for rest in the wilderness.

To the believer who is upright in heart this judgment is of great value, as that which enables him to discern all that has a tendency to hinder his progress or make him slacken his steps. It is the word of God, which — being the revelation of God, the expression of what He is, and of all that surrounds Him, and of what His will is in all the circumstances that surround us — judges everything in the heart which is not of Him. It is more penetrating than a two-edged sword. Living and energetic, it separates all that is most intimately linked together in our hearts and minds. Whenever nature — the "soul" and its feelings — mingles with that which is spiritual, it brings the edge of the sword of the living truth of God between the two, and judges the hidden movements of the heart respecting them. It discerns all the thoughts and intentions of the heart. But it has another character, coming from God (being, as it were, His eye upon the conscience), it brings us into His presence; and all that it forces us to discover, it sets in our conscience before the eye of God Himself. Nothing

is hidden, all is naked and manifested to the eye of Him with whom we have to do.\*

[\* The connection between the word addressed to man and God Himself is very remarkable here.]

Such is the true help, the mighty instrument of God to judge everything in us that would hinder us from pursuing our course through the wilderness with joy, and with a buoyant heart strengthened by faith and confidence in Him. Precious instrument of a faithful God, solemn and serious in its operation; but of priceless and infinite blessing in its effects, in its consequences.

It is an instrument which, in its operations, does not allow “the desires of the flesh and of the mind” liberty to act; which does not permit the heart to deceive itself; but which procures us strength, and places us without any consciousness of evil in the presence of God, to pursue our course with joy and spiritual energy. Here the exhortation, founded on the power of the word, concludes.

But there is another succor, one of a different character, to aid us in our passage through the wilderness; and that is priesthood — a subject which the epistle here begins and carries on through several chapters.

We have a High Priest who has passed through the heavens — as Aaron through the successive parts of the tabernacle — Jesus, the Son of God.

He has, in all things, been tempted like ourselves, sin apart; so that He can sympathise with our infirmities. The word brings to light the intents of the heart, judges the will, and all that has not God for its object and its source. Then, as far as weakness is concerned, we have His sympathy. Christ of course had no evil desires: He was tempted in every way, apart from sin. Sin had no part in it at all. But I do not wish for sympathy with the sin that is in me; I detest it, I wish it to be mortified — judged unsparingly. This the word does. For my weakness and my difficulties I seek sympathy; and I find it in the priesthood of Jesus. It is not necessary, in order to sympathise with me, that a person should feel at the same moment that which I am feeling — rather the contrary. If I am suffering pain, I am not in a condition to think as much of another’s pain. But in

order to sympathise with him I must have a nature capable of appreciating his pain.

Thus it is with Jesus, when exercising His priesthood. He is in every sense beyond the reach of pain and trial, but He is man; and not only has He the human nature which in time suffered grief, but He experienced the trials a saint has to go through more fully than any of ourselves; and His heart, free and full of love, can entirely sympathise with us, according to His experience of ill, and according to the glorious liberty which He now has, to provide and care for it. This encourages us to hold fast our profession in spite of the difficulties that beset our path; for Jesus concerns Himself about them, according to His own knowledge and experience of what they are, and according to the power of His grace.

Therefore, our High Priest being there, we can go with all boldness to the throne of grace, to find mercy and the grace suited to us in all times of need: mercy, because we are weak and wavering; needful grace, because we are engaged in a warfare which God owns.

Observe, it is not that we go to the High Priest. It is often done, and God may have compassion; but it is a proof that we do not fully understand grace. The Priest, the Lord Jesus, occupies Himself about us — sympathises with us, on the one hand; and on the other, we go directly to the throne of grace.

The Spirit does not here speak positively of falls; we find that in 1 John 2. There also it is in connection with communion with His Father, here with access to God. His purpose here is to strengthen us, to encourage us to persevere in the way, conscious of the sympathies which we possess in heaven, and that the throne is always open to us.

**CHAPTER 5.** The epistle then develops the priesthood of the Lord Jesus, comparing it with that of Aaron; but, as we shall see, with a view to bring out the difference rather than the resemblance between them, although there is a general analogy, and the one was a shadow of the other.

This comparison is made in chapter 5:1-10. The line of argument is then interrupted, though the ground of argument is enlarged and developed, till the end of chapter 7, where the comparison with Melchizedec is pursued; and the change of law, consequent on the change of priesthood, is stated,

which introduces the covenants and all that relates to the circumstances of the Jews.

A priest then as taken from among men (he is not here speaking of Christ, but of that with which he compares Him) is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he is able to feel the miseries of others, because he is himself compassed with infirmity, and offers therefore for himself as well as for the people. Moreover no one takes this honor to himself, but receives it, as Aaron did, being called of God. The epistle will speak farther on of the sacrifice — here of the person of the priest, and of the order of the priesthood.

So the Christ glorified not Himself to become a High Priest. The glory of His Person, manifested as man on the earth, and that of His function, are both of them plainly declared of God: the first, when He said, “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” (Psa. 2); the second, in these words, “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec” (Psa. 110). Such then in both personal and official glory is the High Priest, the expected Messiah, Christ.

But His glory (although it gives Him His place in honor before God, and consequent on redemption, so that He can undertake the people’s cause before God according to His will) does not bring Him near to the miseries of men. It is His history on earth which makes us feel how truly able He is to take part in them. “In the days of his flesh,” that is, here below, He went into all the anguish of death in dependence on God, making His request to Him who was able to save Him from it. For, being here in order to obey and to suffer, He did not save Himself. He submitted to everything, obeyed in everything, and depended on God for everything.

He was heard because of His fear. It was proper that He who took death on Himself, as answering for others, should feel its whole weight upon His soul. He would neither escape the consequences of that which He had undertaken (compare chap. 2), nor fail in the just sense of what it was thus to be under the hand of God in judgment. His fear was His piety, the right estimation of the position in which sinful man was found, and what must come from God because of it. For Him however to suffer the consequences of this position was obedience. And this obedience was to be perfect, and to be tried to the utmost.

He was the Son, the glorious Son of God. But though this was so, He was to learn obedience (and to Him it was a new thing), what it was in the world, by all that He suffered. And, having deserved all glory, He was to take His place as the glorified Man — to be perfected; and in that position to become the cause of eternal salvation (not merely temporal deliverances) to them that obey Him; a salvation which should be connected with the position that He had taken in consequence of His work of obedience, saluted by God as “High Priest after the order of Melchizedec.”

That which follows to the end of chapter 6 is a parenthesis which refers to the condition of those to whom the epistle is addressed. They are blamed for the dullness of their spiritual intelligence, and encouraged at the same time by the promises of God; the whole with reference to their position as Jewish believers. Afterwards the line of instruction with regard to Melchizedec is resumed.

For the time, they ought to have been able to teach: nevertheless they needed that some one should teach them the elements of the oracles of God — requiring milk instead of meat.

We may observe that there is no greater hindrance to progress in spiritual life and intelligence than attachment to an ancient form of religion, which, being traditional and not simply personal faith in the truth, consists always in ordinances, and is consequently carnal and earthly. Without this people may be unbelievers; but under the influence of such a system piety itself — expended in forms — makes a barrier between the soul and the light of God: and these forms which surround, preoccupy, and hold the affections captive, prevent them from enlarging and becoming enlightened by means of divine revelation. Morally (as the apostle here expresses it) the senses are not exercised to discern both good and evil.

But the Holy Ghost will not limit Himself to the narrow circle and the weak and futile sentiments of human tradition, nor even to those truths which, in a state like this, one is able to receive. In such a case Christ has not His true place. And this our epistle here develops.

Milk belongs to babes, solid food to those who are of full age. This infancy was the soul's condition under the ordinances and requirements of the law (compare Galatians 4:1-7). But there was a revelation of the Messiah in

connection with these two states — of infancy and of manhood. And the development of the word of righteousness, of the true practical relationships of the soul to God according to His character and ways, was in proportion to the revelation of Christ, who is the manifestation of that character, and the center of all those ways. Therefore it is that, in chapter 5:12, 13, the epistle speaks of the elements, the beginning, of the oracles of God, and of the word of righteousness; in chapter 6:1, of the word of the beginning, or of the first principles, of Christ.

**CHAPTER 6.** Now the Spirit will not stop at this point with Christians, but will go on to that full revelation of His glory which belongs to them that are of full age and indeed forms us for that state.

We easily perceive that the inspired writer tries to make the Hebrews feel that he was placing them on higher and more excellent ground, by connecting them with a heavenly and invisible Christ; and that Judaism kept them back in the position of children. This moreover characterises the whole epistle.

Nevertheless we shall find two things here: on the one hand, the elements and the character of doctrine that belonged to infancy, to “the beginning of the word of Christ,” in contrast with the strength and heavenly savor that accompanied the christian revelation; and, on the other hand, what the revelation of Christ Himself is in connection with this last spiritual and christian system.

But the epistle distinguishes between this system and the doctrine of the Person of Christ, even looked at as man,\* although the present position of Christ gives its character to the christian system. The distinction is made — not that the condition of souls does not depend on the measure of the revelation of Christ and of the position He has taken, but — because the doctrine of His Person and glory goes much farther than the present state of our relationship with God.

[\* The sonship of Christ however, here below, cannot be separated from His eternal sonship, for this lends its character to the relationship in which He stands as Son on earth in time. The passage in the text refers to verses 5 and 8, compared with 6 and 10 of chapter 5. Compare also the beginning of John 17.]

The things spoken of in chapter 6:1, 2, had their place, because the Messiah was then yet to come: all was in a state of infancy. The things spoken of in verses 4, 5 are the privileges that Christians enjoyed in virtue of the work and the glorification of the Messiah. But they are not in themselves the “perfection” mentioned in verse 1, and which relates rather to the knowledge of the Person of Christ Himself. The privileges in question were the effect of the glorious position of His Person in heaven.

It is important to attend to this, in order to understand these passages. In the infancy spoken of in verses 1, 2, the obscurity of the revelations of the Messiah, announced at most by promises and prophecies, left worshippers under the yoke of ceremonies and figures, although in possession of some fundamental truths. His exaltation made way for the power of the Holy Ghost here below: and on this the responsibility of souls which had tasted it depended.

The doctrine of the Person and the glory of Jesus forms the subject of revelation in the epistle, and was the means of deliverance for the Jews from the whole system which had been such a heavy burden on their hearts; it should prevent their forsaking the state described in verses 4 and 5, in order to return into the weakness and (Christ having come) the carnal state of verses 2 and 3.

The epistle then does not desire to establish again the true but elementary doctrines which belonged to the times when Christ was not manifested, but to go forward to the full revelation of His glory and position according to the counsels of God revealed in the word.

The Holy Ghost would not go back again to these former things, because new things had been brought in connection with the heavenly glory of the Messiah, namely, Christianity characterised by the power of the Holy Ghost.

But if any one who had been brought under that power, who had known it, should afterwards abandon it, he could not be renewed again to repentance. The former things of Judaism must be, and were, left behind by that into which he had entered. Christians could not deal with souls by them; and, as for the new things, he had given them up. All God’s means had been employed for him and had produced nothing.



Such a one — of his own will — crucified for himself the Son of God. Associated with the people who had done so, he had acknowledged the sin which his people had committed, and owned Jesus to be the Messiah. But now he committed the crime,\* knowingly and of his own will.

[\* I do not think “afresh” ought to be inserted: the emphasis is on doing it for himself.]

The judgment, the resurrection of the dead, repentance from dead works, had been taught. Under that order of things the nation had crucified their Messiah. Now power had come; which testified of the glorification of the crucified Messiah, the Son of God, in heaven; and which by miracles destroyed (at least in detail) the power of the enemy who was still reigning over the world. These miracles were a partial anticipation of the full and glorious deliverance which should take place in the world to come, when the triumphant Messiah, the Son of God, should entirely destroy all the power of the enemy. Hence they are called the “powers of the world to come.”

The power of the Holy Ghost, the miracles wrought in the bosom of Christianity, were testimonies that the power which was to accomplish that deliverance — although still hidden in heaven — existed nevertheless in the glorious Person of the Son of God. The power did not yet accomplish the deliverance of this world oppressed by Satan, because another thing was being done meanwhile. The light of God was shining, the good word of grace was being preached, the heavenly gift (a better thing than the deliverance of the world) was being tasted; and the sensible power of the Holy Ghost made itself known, while waiting for the return in glory of the Messiah to bind Satan, and thus accomplish the deliverance of the world under His dominion.

Speaking generally, the power of the Holy Ghost, the consequence of the Messiah’s being glorified above, was exercised on earth as a present manifestation and anticipation of the great deliverance to come. The revelation of grace, the good word of God, was preached; and the Christian lived in the sphere where these things displayed themselves, and was subjected to the influence exercised in it. This made itself to be felt by those who were brought in among Christians. Even where there was no spiritual life, these influences were felt.

But, after having been the subject of this influence of the presence of the Holy Ghost, after having tasted the revelation thus made of the goodness of God, and experienced the proofs of His power, if any one then forsook Christ, there remained no other means for restoring the soul, for leading it to repentance. The heavenly treasures were already expended: he had given them up as worthless; he had rejected the full revelation of grace and power, after having known it. What means could now be used? To return to Judaism, and the first principles of the doctrine of Christ in it, when the truth had been revealed, was impossible: and the new light had been known and rejected. In a case like this there was only the flesh; there was no new life. Thorns and briars were being produced as before. There was no real change in the man's state.

When once we have understood that this passage is a comparison of the power of the spiritual system with Judaism, and that it speaks of giving up the former, after having known it, its difficulty disappears. The possession of life is not supposed, nor is that question touched. The passage speaks, not of life, but of the Holy Ghost as a power present in Christianity. To "taste the good word" is to have understood how precious that word is; and not the having been quickened by its means.\* Hence in speaking to the Jewish Christians he hopes better things, and things which accompany salvation, so that all these things could be there and yet no salvation. Fruit there could not be; that supposes life.

[\* So in Matthew 13 some with joy receive it, but there was no root.]

The apostle does not however apply what he says to the Hebrew Christians: for, however low their state might be, there had been fruits, proofs of life, which in itself no mere power is; and he continues his discourse by giving them encouragement, and motives for perseverance.

It will be observed, then, that this passage is a comparison between that which was possessed before and after Christ was glorified — the state and privileges of professors, at these two periods, without any question as to personal conversion. When the power of the Holy Ghost was present, and there was the full revelation of grace, if any forsook the assembly, fell away from Christ, and turned back again, there was no means of renewing them to repentance. The inspired writer therefore would not again lay the foundation of former things with regard to Christ — things already grown

old — but would go on, for the profit of those who remained stedfast in the faith.

We may also remark how the epistle, in speaking of christian privileges, does not lose sight of the future earthly state, the glory and the privileges of the millennial world. The miracles are the miracles of the world to come; they belong to that period. The deliverance and the destruction of Satan's power should then be complete; those miracles were deliverances, samples of that power. We saw this point brought into notice (chap. 2:5) at the beginning of the doctrine of the epistle; and in chapter 4 the rest of God left vague in its character, in order to embrace both the heavenly part and the earthly part of our Lord's millennial reign. Here the present power of the Holy Ghost characterises the ways of God, Christianity; but the miracles are a foretaste of the coming age, in which the whole world will be blessed.

In the encouragements that it gives them, the epistle already calls to mind the principles by which the father of the faithful and of the Jewish nation had walked, and the way in which God had strengthened him in his faith. Abraham had to rest on promises, without possessing that which was promised; and this, with regard to rest and glory, was the state in which the Hebrew Christians then were. But at the same time, in order to give full assurance to the heart, God had confirmed His word by an oath, in order that they who build upon this hope of promised glory might have strong and satisfying consolation. And this assurance has received a still greater confirmation. It entered into that within the veil, it found its sanction in the sanctuary itself, whither a forerunner had entered, giving not only a word, an oath, but a personal guarantee for the fulfillment of these promises, and the sanctuary of God as a refuge for the heart; thus giving, for those who had spiritual understanding, a heavenly character to the hope which they cherished; while showing, by the character of Him who had entered into heaven, the certain fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises, in connection with a heavenly Mediator, who, by His position, assured that fulfillment; establishing the earthly blessing upon the firm foundation of heaven itself, and giving at the same time a higher and more excellent character to that blessing by uniting it to heaven, and making it flow from thence.

We have thus the double character of blessing which this book again presents to our mind, in connection with the Person of the Messiah, and the whole linked by faith with Jesus.

Jesus has entered into heaven as a Forerunner. He is there. We belong to that heaven. He is there as High Priest. During the present time therefore His priesthood has a heavenly character; nevertheless He is priest, personally, after the order of Melchizedec. It sets aside then the whole Aaronic order, though the priesthood be exercised now after the analogy of Aaron's, but, by its nature, points out in the future a royalty which is not yet manifested. Now the very fact that this future royalty was connected with the Person of Him who was seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high, according to Psalm 110 fixed the attention of the Hebrew Christian, when tempted to turn back, on Him who was in the heavens, and made him understand the priesthood which the Lord is now exercising; it delivered him from Judaism, and strengthened him in the heavenly character of the Christianity which he had embraced.

**CHAPTER 7.** The epistle, returning to the subject of Melchizedec, reviews therefore the dignity of his person and the importance of his priesthood. For on priesthood, as a means of drawing nigh to God, the whole system connected with it depended.

Melchizedec then (a typical and characteristic person, as the use of his name in Psalm 110 proves) was king of Salem, that is king of peace, and, by name, king of righteousness. Righteousness and peace characterise his reign. But above all he was priest of the Most High God. This is the name of God as supreme Governor of all things — Possessor, as is added in Genesis, of heaven and earth. It is thus that Nebuchadnezzar, the humbled earthly potentate, acknowledged Him. It was thus He revealed Himself to Abraham, when Melchizedec blessed the patriarch after he had conquered his enemies. In connection with his walk of faith, the name of God for Abraham was “The Almighty.” Here Abraham, victorious over the kings of the earth, is blessed by Melchizedec, by the king of righteousness, in connection with God as Possessor of heaven and earth, the Most High. This looks onward to the royalty of Christ, a Priest upon His throne, when by the will and the power of God He shall have triumphed over all His enemies — a time not yet arrived — first fulfilled in the millennium, as

it is commonly expressed, though this rather refers to the earthly part. Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedec. His royalty was not all, for Psalm 110 is very clear in describing Melchizedec as priest, and as possessing a lasting and uninterrupted priesthood. He had no sacerdotal parentage from whom he derived his priesthood. As a priest, he had neither father nor mother; unlike the sons of Aaron, he had no genealogy (compare Ezra 2:62); he had no limits assigned to the term of his priestly service, as was the case with the sons of Aaron (Numbers 4:3). He was made a priest, like — in his priestly character — to the Son of God; but, as yet, the latter is in heaven.

The fact that he received tithes from Abraham, and that he blessed Abraham, showed the high and pre-eminent dignity of this otherwise unknown and mysterious personage. The only thing that is testified of him — without naming father or mother, commencement of life, or death that may have taken place — is that he lived.

The dignity of his person was beyond that of Abraham, the depositary of the promises; that of his priesthood was above Aaron's, who in Abraham paid the tithes which Levi himself received from his brethren. The priesthood then is changed, and with it the whole system that depended on it.

**PSALM 110** interrupted by faith in Christ — for the epistle, we need not say, speaks always to Christians — is still the point on which its argument is founded. The first proof then, that the whole was changed, is that the Lord Jesus, the Messiah (a Priest after the order of Melchizedec), did not spring evidently from the sacerdotal tribe, but from another, namely, that of Judah. For that Jesus was the Messiah, they believed. But, according to the Jewish scriptures, the Messiah was such as He is here presented; and in that case the priesthood was changed, and with it the whole system. And this was not only a consequence that must be drawn from the fact that the Messiah was of the tribe of Judah, although a Priest; but it was requisite that another priest than the priest of Aaron's family should arise, and one after the similitude of Melchizedec, who should not be after the law of a commandment which had no more power than the flesh to which it was applied, but who should be according to the power of

a never ending life. The testimony of the psalm to this was positive: “Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec.”

For there is in fact a disannulling of the commandment that existed previously, because it was unprofitable (for the law brought nothing to perfection); and there is the bringing in of a better hope, by which we draw nigh to God.

Precious difference! A commandment to man, sinful and afar from God, replaced by a hope, a confidence, founded on grace and on divine promise, through which we can come even into God’s presence.

The law, doubtless, was good; but separation still subsisted between man and God. The law made nothing perfect. God was ever perfect, and human perfection was required; all must be according to what divine perfection required of man. But sin was there, and the law was consequently without power (save to condemn); its ceremonies and ordinances were but figures, and a heavy yoke. Even that which temporarily relieved the conscience brought sin to mind and never made the conscience perfect towards God. They were still at a distance from Him. Grace brings the soul to God, who is known in love and in a righteousness which is for us.

The character of the new priesthood bore the stamp, in all its features, of its superiority to that which existed under the order of the law and with which the whole system of the law either stood or fell.

The covenant connected with the new priesthood answered likewise to the superiority of the latter over the former priesthood.

The priesthood of Jesus was established by oath; that of Aaron was not. The priesthood of Aaron passed from one person to another, because death put an end to its exercise by the individuals who were invested with it. But Jesus abides the same for ever; He has a priesthood that is not transmitted to others. Thus He saves completely, and to the end, those that come unto God by Him, seeing that He ever lives to intercede for them.

Accordingly “such a high priest became us.” Glorious thought! Called to be in the presence of God, to be in relationship with Him in the heavenly glory, to draw near to Him on high, where nothing that defiles can enter,

we needed a High Priest in the place to which access was given us (as the Jews in the earthly temple), and such a One as the glory and purity of heaven required. What a demonstration that we belong to heaven, and of the exalted nature of our relationship with God! Such a Priest became us: “Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, exalted above the heavens — ”for so are we, as to our position, having to do with God there — a Priest who needs not to renew the sacrifices, as though any work to put away sin still remained to be done, or their sins could still be imputed to believers; for then it would be impossible to stay in the heavenly sanctuary. As having once for all completed His work for the putting away of sin, our Priest offered His sacrifice once for all when He offered up Himself.

For the law made high priests who had the infirmities of men, for they were men themselves; the oath of God, which came after the law, establishes the Son, when He is perfected for ever, consecrated in heaven unto God.

We see here that, although there was an analogy and the figures of heavenly things, there is more of contrast than of comparison in this epistle. The legal priests had the same infirmities as other men; Jesus has a glorified priesthood according to the power of an endless life.

The introduction of this new priesthood, exercised in heaven, implies a change in the sacrifices and in the covenant. This the inspired writer develops here, setting forth the value of the sacrifice of Christ, and the long-promised new covenant. The direct connection is with the sacrifices; but he turns aside for a moment to the two covenants, a so wide-embracing and all-weighty consideration for the christian Jew who had been under the first.

**CHAPTER 8** in this respect is simple and clear; the last verses only give room for a few remarks.

The sum of the doctrine we have been considering is, that we have a High Priest who is seated on the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the heavenly sanctuary which is not made with hands. As such, He must have an offering to present there. Jesus, were He on earth, would not be a Priest; there were priests on earth according to the law, in

which all things were but figures of the heavenly things; as Moses was told to make all according to the pattern that was shown him in the mount. But the ministry of Jesus is more excellent, because He is the Mediator of a better covenant, spoken of in Jeremiah 31, which is here quoted; a clear and simple proof that the first covenant was not to continue.

We again find here that particular development of the truth which was called for by the character of the persons to whom this letter was addressed.

The first covenant was made with Israel; the second must be so likewise, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah. The epistle however in this passage only makes use of the fact that there was to be a second covenant, in order to demonstrate that the first was to last no longer. It had grown old, and was to vanish away. He recites the terms of the new covenant. We shall find that he makes use of it afterwards. In that which follows, he contrasts the services that belonged to the first with the perfect work on which Christianity is founded. Thus the extent and the value of the work of Christ are introduced.

Although there is no difficulty here, it is important to have light with regard to these two covenants, because some have very vague ideas on this point, and many souls, putting themselves under covenants — that is, in relationship with God under conditions in which He has not placed them — lose their simplicity, and do not hold fast grace and the fullness of the work of Christ, and the position He has acquired for them in heaven.

A covenant is a principle of relationship with God on the earth — conditions established by God under which man is to live with Him. The word may perhaps be used figuratively, or by accommodation. It is applied to details of the relationship of God with Israel, and so to Abraham (Genesis 15), and like cases; but, strictly speaking, there are but two covenants, in which God has dealt with man on earth, or will — the old and the new. The old was established at Sinai. The new covenant is made also with the two houses of Israel.\*

[\* We have also, at the end of the epistle, the expression “the blood of the everlasting covenant.” “Covenant” he uses, I doubt not (as the word “law” also is used), because it was commonly employed as the condition of relationship with God, and “eternal” is characteristic of the Hebrews. There have been, and will be, covenants in time and for the earth; but we have



eternal conditions of relationship with God, of which the blood of Christ is the expression and security, founded in everlasting grace, and righteousness as well as grace, by that precious blood, in which all the character and all the purpose of God has been made good and glorified, as well as our sins been put away.]

The gospel is not a covenant, but the revelation of the salvation of God. It proclaims the great salvation. We enjoy indeed all the essential privileges of the new covenant, its foundation being laid on God's part in the blood of Christ, but we do so in spirit, not according to the letter.

The new covenant will be established formally with Israel in the millennium. Meanwhile the old covenant is judged by the fact that there is a new one.

**CHAPTER 9.** The epistle, recounting some particular circumstances which characterised the first covenant, shows that neither were sins put away, nor was the conscience purged by its means, nor the entrance into the holiest granted to the worshippers. The veil concealed God. The high priest went in once a year to make reconciliation — no one else. The way to God in holiness was barred. Perfect, as pertaining to the conscience, they could not be through the blood of bulls and of goats. These were but provisionary and figurative ordinances, until God took up the real work itself, in order to accomplish it fully and for ever.

But this brings us to the focus of the light which God gives us by the Holy Ghost in this epistle. Before proving by the scriptures of the Old Testament the doctrine that he announced, and the discontinuance of the legal sacrifices — of all sacrifice for sin, the writer, with a heart full of the truth and of the importance of that truth, teaches the value and the extent of the sacrifice of Christ (still in contrast with the former offerings, but a contrast that rests on the intrinsic value of the offering of Christ). These three results are presented: first, the opened way into the sanctuary was manifested; that is, access to God Himself, where He is; second, the purification of the conscience; third, an eternal redemption; I may add the promise of an eternal inheritance.

One feels the immense importance, the inestimable value, of the first. The believer is admitted into God's own presence by a new and living way which He has consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; has constant access to God, immediate access to the place where He is, in

the light. What complete salvation, what blessedness, what security! For how could we have access to God in the light, if everything that would separate us from Him, were not entirely taken away through Him who was once offered to bear the sins of many? But here it is the precious and perfect result, in this respect, which is revealed to us, and formally proved in chapter 10, as a right that we possess, that access to God Himself is entirely and freely open to us. We are not indeed told in this passage that we are seated there, for it is not our union with Christ that is the subject of this epistle, but our access to God in the sanctuary. And it is important to note this last, and it is as precious in its place as the other. We are viewed as on earth, and being on earth we have free and full access to God in the sanctuary. We go in perfect liberty to God, where His holiness dwells, and where nothing that is contrary to Him can be admitted. What happiness! What perfect grace! What a glorious result, supreme and complete! Could anything better be desired, remembering too that it is our dwelling-place? This is our position in the presence of God through the entrance of Christ into the sanctuary.

The second result shows us the personal state we are brought into, in order to the enjoyment of our position; that we may on our part, enter in freely. It is that our Savior has rendered our conscience perfect, so that we can go into the sanctuary without an idea of fear, without one question as to sin arising in our minds. A perfect conscience is not an innocent conscience which, happy in its unconsciousness, does not know evil, and does not know God revealed in holiness. A perfect conscience knows God; it is cleansed, and, having the knowledge of good and evil according to the light of God Himself, it knows that it is purified from all evil according to His purity. Now the blood of bulls and goats, and the washings repeated under the law, could never make the conscience perfect. They could sanctify carnally, so as to enable the worshipper to approach God outwardly, yet only afar off, with the veil still unrent. But a real purification from sin and sins, so that the soul can be in the presence of God Himself in the light without spot, with the consciousness of being so, the offerings under the law could never produce. They were but figures. But, thanks be to God, Christ has accomplished the work; and, present for us now in the heavenly and eternal sanctuary, He is the witness there that our sins are put away; so that all conscience of sin before God is destroyed, because we know

that He who bore our sins is in the presence of God, after having accomplished the work of expiation. Thus we have the consciousness of being in the light without spot. We have the purification not only of sins but of the conscience, so that we can use this access to God in full liberty and joy, presenting ourselves before Him who has so loved us.

The third result, which seals and characterises the two others, is that Christ, having once entered in, abides in heaven. He has gone into the heavenly sanctuary to remain there by virtue of an eternal redemption, of blood that has everlasting validity. The work is completely done, and can never change in value. If our sins are effectually put away, God glorified, and righteousness complete, that which once availed to effect this can never not avail. The blood shed once for all is ever efficacious.

Our High Priest is in the sanctuary, not with the blood of sacrifices, which are but figures of the true. The work has been done which puts sin away. This redemption is neither temporal nor transitory. It is the redemption of the soul, and for eternity, according to the moral efficacy of that which has been done.

Here then are the three aspects of the result of the work of Christ: immediate access to God; a purged conscience; an eternal redemption.

Three points remain to be noticed before entering on the subjects of the covenants, which is here resumed.

First, Christ is a High Priest of good things to come. In saying “things to come,” the starting-point is Israel under the law before the advent of our Lord. Nevertheless, if these good things were now acquired, if it could be said, “we have them,” because Christianity was their fulfillment, it could hardly be still said — when Christianity was established — “good things to come.” They are yet to come. These “good things” consist of all that the Messiah will enjoy when He reigns. This also is the reason that the earthly things have their place. But our present relationship with Him is only and altogether heavenly. He acts as Priest in a tabernacle which is not of this creation: it is heavenly, in the presence of God, not made with hands. Our place is in heaven.

In the second place, “Christ offered himself, by the eternal Spirit,\* without spot, to God.” Here the precious offering up of Christ is viewed

as an act that He performed as man, though in the perfection and value of His Person. He offered Himself to God — but as moved by the power, and according to the perfection of the eternal Spirit. All the motives that governed this action, and the accomplishment of the fact according to those motives, were purely and perfectly those of the Holy Ghost; that is, absolutely divine in their perfection, but of the Holy Ghost acting in a man (a man without sin who, born and living ever by the power of the Holy Ghost, had never known sin; who, being exempt from it by birth, never allowed it to enter into Him); so that it is the Man Christ who offers Himself. This was requisite.

- [\* The reader will remark how anxiously, so to speak, the epistle here attaches the epithet “eternal” to everything. It was not a temporary or earthly ground of relationship with God, but an eternal one; so of redemption; so of inheritance. Corresponding to this, as to the work on earth, it is once for all. It is not unimportant to notice this as to the nature of the work. Hence the epithet attached even to the Spirit.]

Thus the offering was in itself perfect and pure, without defilement; and the act of offering was perfect, whether in love or in obedience, or in the desire to glorify God, or to accomplish the purpose of God. Nothing mingled itself with the perfection of His intent in offering Himself.

Moreover, it was not a temporary offering, which applied to one sin with which the conscience was burdened and which went no farther than that one, an offering which could not, by its nature, have the perfection spoken of, because it was not the Person offering up Himself, nor was it absolutely for God, because there was in it neither the perfection of will nor of obedience. But the offering of Christ was one which, being perfect in its moral nature, being in itself perfect in the eyes of God, was necessarily eternal in its value. For this value was as enduring as the nature of God who was glorified in it.

It was made, not of necessity, but of free will, and in obedience. It was made by a Man for the glory of God, but through the eternal Spirit, ever the same in its nature and value.

All being thus perfectly fulfilled for the glory of God, the conscience of every one that comes to Him by this offering is purged; dead works are blotted out and set aside; we stand before God on the ground of that which Christ has done.

And here the third point comes in. Being perfectly cleansed in conscience from all that man in his sinful nature produces, and having to do with God in light and in love, there being no question of conscience with Him, we are in a position to serve the living God. Precious liberty! in which, happy and without question before God according to His nature in light, we can serve Him according to the activity of His nature in love. Judaism knew no more of this than it did of perfection in conscience. Obligation towards God that system indeed maintained; and it offered a certain provision for that which was needed for outward failure. But to have a perfect conscience, and then to serve God in love, according to His will — of this it knew nothing.

This is christian position: the conscience perfect by Christ,\* according to the nature of God Himself; the service of God in liberty, according to His nature of love acting towards others.

[\* For in Christ we are the righteousness of God. His blood cleanses us on God's part. Jesus wrought out the purification of sins by Himself, and glorified God in so doing.]

For the Jewish system, in its utmost advantages, was characterised by the holy place. There were duties and obligations to be fulfilled in order to draw near, sacrifices to cleanse outwardly him who drew near outwardly. Meanwhile God was always concealed. No one entered into "the holy place": it is implied that the "most holy" was inaccessible. No sacrifice had yet been offered which gave free access, and at all times. God was concealed: that He was so characterised the position. They could not stand before Him. Neither did He manifest Himself. They served Him out of His presence without going in.

It is important to notice this truth, that the whole system in its highest and nearest access to God was characterised by the holy place, in order to understand the passage before us.

Now the first tabernacle — Judaism as a system — is identified with the first part of the tabernacle, and that open only to the priestly part of the nation, the second part (that is, the sanctuary) only showing, by the circumstances connected with it, that there was no access to God. When the author of the epistle goes on to the present position of Christ, he leaves the earthly tabernacle — it is heaven itself he then speaks of, a

tabernacle not made with hands, nor of this creation, into which he introduces us.

The first tent or part of the tabernacle gave the character of the relationship of the people with God, and that only by a priesthood. They could not reach God. When we approach God Himself, it is in heaven; and the entire first system disappears. Everything was offered as a figure in the first system, and even as a figure showed that the conscience was not yet set free, nor the presence of God accessible to man. The remembrance of sins was continually renewed (the annual sacrifice was a memorial of sins, and God was not manifested, nor the way to Him opened).

Christ comes, accomplishes the sacrifice, makes the conscience perfect, goes into heaven itself; and we draw nigh to God in the light. To mingle the service of the first tabernacle or holy place with christian service is to deny the latter; for the meaning of the first was that the way to God was not yet open; the meaning of the second, that it is open.

God may have patience with the weakness of man. Till the destruction of Jerusalem He bore with the Jews; but the two systems can never really go on together, namely, a system which said that one cannot draw nigh to God, and another system which gives access to Him.

Christ is come, the High Priest of a new system, of "good things," which, under the old system, were yet "to come"; but He did not enter into the earthly "most holy place," leaving the "holy place" to subsist without a true meaning. He is come by the (not a) more excellent and more perfect tabernacle. I repeat it, for it is essential here: the holy place, or the first tent, is the figure of the relationship of men with God under the first tabernacle (taken as a whole); so that we may say, "the first tabernacle," applying it to the first part of the tabernacle, and pass on to the first tabernacle as a whole, and as a recognised period having the same meaning. This the epistle does here. To come out of this position, we must leave typical things and pass into heaven, the true sanctuary where Christ ever lives, and where no veil bars our entrance.

Now it is not said, that we have "the good things to come." Christ has gone into heaven itself, the High Priest of those good things, securing their possession to them that trust in Him. But we have access to\* God in the

light by virtue of Christ's presence there. That presence is the proof of righteousness fully established; the blood, an evidence that our sins are put away for ever; and our conscience is made perfect. Christ in heaven is the guarantee for the fulfillment of every promise. He has opened an access for us, even now, to God in the light; having cleansed our consciences once for all — for He dwells on high continuously — that we may enter in, and that we may serve God here below.

[\* It is all-important thoroughly to understand, that it is into the presence of God that we enter; and that, at all times, and by virtue of a sacrifice and of blood which never lose their value. The worshipper, under the former tabernacle, did not come into the presence of God; he stayed outside the unrent veil. He sinned — a sacrifice was offered: he sinned again — a sacrifice was offered. Now the veil is rent. We are always in the presence of God without a veil. Happen what may, He always sees us in His presence — according to the efficacy of Christ's perfect sacrifice. We are there now, by virtue of a perfect sacrifice, offered for the putting away of sin, according to the divine glory, and which has perfectly accomplished the purification of sins. I should not be in the presence of God in the sanctuary, if I had not been purified according to the purity of God, and by God. It was this which brought me there. And this sacrifice and this blood can never lose their value. Through them I am therefore perfect for ever in the presence of God; I was brought into it by them.]

All this is already established and secured; but there is more. The new covenant, of which He is Mediator, is founded on His blood.

The way in which the apostle always avoids the direct application of the new covenant is very striking.

The transgressions that were imputed under the first covenant, and which the sacrifices it offered could not expiate, are by the blood of the new covenant entirely blotted out. Thus they which are called — observe the expression (v. 15) can receive the promise of the eternal inheritance; that is to say, the foundation is laid for the accomplishment of the blessings of the covenant. He says, "the eternal inheritance," because, as we have seen, the reconciliation was complete, our sins born and cancelled, and the work by which sin is finally put away out of God's sight accomplished, according to the nature and character of God Himself. This is the main point of all this part of the epistle.

It is because of the necessity there was for this sacrifice — the necessity that sins, and finally sin, should be entirely put away,\* in order to the

enjoyment of the eternal promises (for God could not bless, as an eternal principle and definitively, while sin was before His eyes), that Christ, the Son of God, Man on earth, became the Mediator of the new covenant, in order that by death He might make a way for the permanent enjoyment of that which had been promised. The new covenant, in itself, did not speak of a Mediator. God would write His laws on the hearts of His people, and would remember sins no more.

- [\* The work in virtue of which all sin is finally put away out of God's sight — abolished — is accomplished, the question of good and evil is come to a final issue on the cross, and God perfectly glorified when sin was before Him; the result will not be finally accomplished till the new heavens and the new earth. But our sins having been born by Christ on the cross, He rises, atonement being made, an eternal testimony that they are gone for ever, and that by faith we are now justified and have peace. We must not confound these two things, our sins being put away, and the perfectly glorifying God in respect of sin, when Christ was made sin, the results of which are not yet accomplished. As regards the sinful nature, it is still in us; but Christ having died, its condemnation took place then, but, that being in death, we reckon ourselves dead to it, and no condemnation for us.]

The covenant is not yet made with Israel and Judah. But meanwhile God has established and revealed the Mediator, who has accomplished the work on which the fulfillment of the promises can be founded in a way that is durable in principle, eternal, because connected with the nature of God Himself. This is done by means of death, the wages of sin, and by which sin is left behind; and expiation for sins being made according to the righteousness of God, an altogether new position is taken outside and beyond sin. The Mediator has paid the ransom. Sin has no more right over us.

Verses 16, 17 are a parenthesis, in which the idea of a "testament" (it is the same word as "covenant" in the Greek, a disposition on the part of one who has the right of disposal) is introduced, to make us understand that death must have taken place before the rights acquired under the testament can be enjoyed.\*

- [\* Some think that these two verses are not a parenthesis speaking of a testament, but a continuation of the argument on the covenant, taking the Greek word to mean, not the testator, but the sacrifice, which put a seal, more solemn than an oath, on the obligation of observing the covenant. It is a very delicate Greek question, on which I do not here enter. But I cannot say they have convinced me.]



This necessity of the covenant being founded on the blood of a victim was not forgotten in the case of the first covenant. Everything was sprinkled with blood. Only, in this case, it was the solemn sanction of death attached to the obligation of the covenant. The types always spoke of the necessity of death intervening before men could be in relationship with God. Sin had brought in death and judgment. We must either undergo the judgment ourselves, or see our sins blotted out through it having been undergone by another for us.

Three applications of the blood are presented here. The covenant is founded on the blood. Defilement is washed away by its means. Guilt is removed by the remission obtained through the blood that has been shed.

These are, in fact, the three things necessary. First, the ways of God in bestowing blessing according to His promises are connected with His righteousness, the sins of those blessed being atoned for, the requisite foundation of the covenant, Christ having withal glorified God in respect of sin, when made sin on the cross.

Second, the purification of the sin by which we were defiled (by which all things, that could not be guilty, were nevertheless defiled) is accomplished. Here there were cases in which water was typically used: this is moral and practical cleansing. It flows from death; the water that purifies proceeded from the side of the holy Victim already dead. It is the application of the word — which judges all evil and reveals all good — to the conscience and the heart.

Third, as regards remission. In no case can this be obtained without the shedding of blood. Observe that it does not here say “application.” It is the accomplishment of the work of true propitiation, which is here spoken of. Without shedding of blood there is no remission. All-important truth! For a work of remission, death and blood-shedding must take place.

Two consequences flow from these views of atonement and reconciliation to God.

First, it was necessary that there should be a better sacrifice, a more excellent victim, than those which were offered under the old covenant, because it was the heavenly things themselves, and not their figures, that

were to be purified. For it is into the presence of God in heaven itself that Christ has entered.

Secondly, Christ was not to offer Himself often, as the high priest went in every year with the blood of others. For He offered up Himself. Hence, if all that was available in the sacrifice was not brought to perfection by a single offering once made, He must have suffered often since the foundation of the world.\* This remark leads to the clear and simple declaration of the ways of God on this point — a declaration of priceless value. God allowed ages to pass (the different distinct periods in which man has in divers ways been put to the test, and in which he has had time to show what he is) without yet accomplishing His work of grace. This trial of man has served to show that he is bad in nature and in will. The multiplication of means only made it more evident that he was essentially bad at heart, for he availed himself of none of them to draw near to God. On the contrary, his enmity against God was fully manifested.

[\* And He must have repeatedly suffered, for there must be reality in putting away sin.]

When God had made this plain, before the law, under the law, by promises, by the coming and presence of His Son, then the work of God takes the place, for our salvation and God's glory, of man's responsibility — on the ground of which faith knows man is entirely lost. This explains the expression (v. 26) "in the consummation of the ages."

Now this work is perfect, and perfectly accomplished. Sin had dishonored God, and separated man from Him. All that God had done to give him the means of return only ended in affording him opportunity to fill up the measure of his sin by the rejection of Jesus. But in this the eternal counsels of God were fulfilled, at least the moral basis laid, and that in infinite perfection, for their actual accomplishment in their results. All now in fact, as in purpose always, rested on the second Adam, and on what God had done, not on man's responsibility, while that was fully met for God's glory (compare 2 Timothy 1:9, 10; Titus 1:1, 2). The Christ, whom man rejected, had appeared in order to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Thus it was morally the consummation of the ages.

The result of the work and power of God are not yet manifested. A new creation will develop them. But man, as the child of Adam, has run his

whole career in his relationship with God: he is enmity against God. Christ, fulfilling the will of God, has come in the consummation of ages, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and His work to this end is accomplished. This is the moral power of His act,\* of His sacrifice before God; in result, sin will be entirely blotted out of the heavens and the earth. To faith this result, namely, the putting away of sin, is already realised in the conscience,\*\* because Christ who was made sin for us has died and died to sin, and now is risen and glorified, sin (even as made it for us) left behind.

[\* The more we examine the cross from God's side of it, the more we shall see this: man's enmity against God, and against God come in goodness, was absolutely displayed; Satan's power in evil over man too; man's perfectness in love to the Father and obedience to Him; God's majesty and righteousness against sin, and love to sinners, all He is; all good and evil perfectly brought to an issue, and that in the place of sin, that is, in Christ made sin for us. When sin was as such before His face in the sinless One where it was needed and God perfectly glorified, and indeed the Son of man too, morally the whole thing was settled, and we know it: the actual results are not yet produced.]

[\*\* The judgment, which will fall upon the wicked, is not sin. Much more also is involved in the work and position of Christ, even heavenly glory with God: but it is not our subject here.]

Moreover, this result is announced to the believer — to those who are looking for the Lord's return. Death and judgment are the lot of men as children of Adam. Christ has been offered once to bear the sins of many; and "unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation," not to judgment.

For them, as to their standing before God, sin is even now put away: as Christ is, so are they; their own sins are all blotted out. Christ appeared the first time in order to be made sin for us, and to bear our sins; they were laid upon Him on the cross. And, with regard to those who wait for Him, those sins are entirely put away. When He returns, Christ has nothing to do with sin, as far as they are concerned. It was fully dealt with at His first coming. He appears the second time to deliver them from all the results of sin, from all bondage. He will appear, not for judgment, but unto salvation. The putting away of sin on their behalf before God has been so complete, the sins of believers so entirely blotted out, that, when He appears the second time, He has, as to them, nothing to do with sin. He appears apart

from sin, not only without sin in His blessed Person — this was the case at His first coming — but (as to those who look for Him) outside all question of sin, for their final deliverance.

“Without sin” is in contrast with “to bear the sins of many.”\* But it will be remarked, that the taking up of the assembly is not mentioned here. It is well to notice the language. The character of His second coming is the subject. He has been manifested once. Now He is seen by those who look for Him. The expression may apply to the deliverance of the Jews who wait for Him in the last days. He will appear for their deliverance. But we expect the Lord for this deliverance, and we shall see Him when He accomplishes it even for us. The apostle does not touch the question of the difference between this and our being caught up, and does not use the word which serves to announce His public manifestation. He will appear to those who expect Him. He is not seen by all the world, nor is it consequently the judgment, although that may follow. The Holy Ghost speaks only of them that look for the Lord. To them He will appear. By them He will be seen, and it will be the time of their deliverance; so that it is true for us, and also applicable to the Jewish remnant in the last days.

[\* It is of moment to see the difference between verses 26 and 28. Sin had to be put away abstractedly out of God’s sight, and hence He had to be perfectly glorified in respect of it, in that place where sin was before Him. Christ was made sin — appeared to abolish it out of God’s sight. Besides this, our sins (guilt) were in question, and Christ bore them in His own body on the tree. The sins are born, and Christ has them no more. They are gone as guilt before God for ever. The work for the abolition of sin in God’s sight is done, and God owns it as done, having glorified Jesus who has glorified Him as to it when made sin. So that for God the thing is settled, and faith recognises this, but the result is not produced. The work is before God in all its value, but the sin still exists in the believer and in the world. Faith owns both, knows that in God’s sight it is done, and rests as God does in it, but the believer knows that sin is still, *de facto*, there and in him: only he has a title to reckon himself dead to it — that sin in the flesh is condemned, but in the sacrifice for sin, so that there is none for him. The putting away is not accomplished, but what does it is; so that God recognises it, and so does faith, and stands perfectly clear before God as to sin and sins. He that is dead (and we are, as having died with Christ) is justified from sin. Our sins have all been born. The difficulty partly arises from “sin” being used for a particular act, and also abstractedly. In the word “sins” there is no such ambiguity. A sacrifice for sin may apply to a particular fault. Sin entered into the world is another idea. This ambiguity has produced the confusion.]

Thus the christian position, and the hope of the world to come, founded on the blood and on the Mediator of the new covenant, are both given here. The one is the present portion of the believer, the other is secured as the hope of Israel.

How wonderful is the grace which we are now considering!

There are two things that present themselves to us in Christ — the attractions to our heart of His grace and goodness, and His work which brings our souls into the presence of God. It is with the latter that the Holy Ghost here occupies us. There is not only the piety which grace produces; there is the efficacy of the work itself. What is this efficacy? What is the result for us of His work? Access to God in the light without a veil, ourselves entirely clear of all sin before Him, as white as snow in the light which only shows it. Marvellous position for us! We have not to wait for a day of judgment (assuredly coming as it is), nor to seek for means of approach to God. We are in His presence. Christ appears in the presence of God for us; and not only this: He remains there ever; our position therefore never changes. It is true that we are called to walk according to that position. But this does not touch the fact that such is the position. And how came we into it? and in what condition? Our sins entirely put away, perfectly put away, and once for all, and the whole question of sin settled for ever before God, we are there because Christ has finished the work which abolished it, and without it in God's sight. So that there are the two things — this work accomplished, and this position ours in the presence of God.

We see the force of the contrast between this and Judaism. According to the latter, divine service, as we have seen, was performed outside the veil. The worshippers did not reach the presence of God. Thus they had always to begin again. The propitiatory sacrifice was renewed from year to year — a continually repeated testimony that sin still was there. Individually they obtained a temporary pardon for particular acts. It had constantly to be renewed. The conscience was never made perfect, the soul was not in the presence of God, this great question was never settled. (How many souls are even now in this condition!) The entrance of the high priest once a year did but furnish a proof that the way was still barred, that God could not be approached, but that sin was still remembered.

But now the guilt of believers is gone, their sins washed away by a work done once for all; the conscience is made perfect; nor is there any condemnation for them. Sin in the flesh has been condemned in Christ when a sacrifice for sin, and Christ appears ever in the presence of God for us. The High Priest remains there. Thus, instead of having a memorial of sin reiterated from year to year, perfect righteousness subsists ever for us in the presence of God. The position is entirely changed.

The lot of man (for this perfect work takes us out of Judaism) is death and judgment. But now our lot depends on Christ, not on Adam. Christ was offered to bear the sins of many\* the work is complete, the sins blotted out, and to those who look for Him He will appear without having anything to do with sin, that question having been entirely settled at His first coming. In the death of Jesus, God dealt with the sins of those who look for Him; and He will appear, not to judge, but unto salvation — to deliver them finally from the position into which sin had brought them. This will have its application to the Jewish remnant according to the circumstances of their position; but in an absolute way it applies to the Christian, who has heaven for his portion.

[\* The word “many” has a double bearing here, negative and positive. It could not be said “all,” or all would be saved. On the other hand the word many generalises the work, so that it is not the Jews only who are its object.]

The essential point established in the doctrine of the death of Christ is, that He offered Himself once for all. We must bear this in mind, to understand the full import of all that is here said. The tenth chapter is the development and application of this. In it the author recapitulates his doctrine on this point, and applies it to souls, confirming it by scripture, and by considerations which are evident to every enlightened conscience.

1. The law, with its sacrifices, did not make the worshippers perfect; for, if they had been brought to perfection, the sacrifices would not have been offered afresh. If they were offered again, it was because the worshippers were not perfect. On the contrary the repetition of the sacrifice was a memorial of sins; it reminded the people that sin was still there, and that it was still before God. In effect the law, although it was the shadow of things to come, was not their true image. There were sacrifices; but they were repeated, instead of there being one only sacrifice of eternal efficacy. There was a high priest, but he was mortal, and the priesthood

transmissible. He went into the holiest, but only once a year, the veil which concealed God being unrent, and the high priest unable to remain in His presence, the work being not perfect. Thus there were indeed elements which plainly indicated the constituent parts, so to speak, of the priesthood of the good things to come; but the state of the worshippers was in the one case quite the opposite of that which it was in the other. In the first, every act showed that the work of reconciliation was not done; in the second, the position of the high priest and of the worshipper is a testimony that this work has been accomplished, and that the latter are perfected for ever in the presence of God.

In **CHAPTER 10** this principle is applied to the sacrifice. Its repetition proved that sin was there. That the sacrifice of Christ was only offered once, was the demonstration of its eternal efficacy. Had the Jewish sacrifices rendered the worshippers really perfect before God, they would have ceased to be offered. The apostle is speaking (although the principle is general) of the yearly sacrifice on the day of atonement. For if, through the efficacy of the sacrifice, they had been permanently made perfect, they would have had no more conscience of sins, and could not have had the thought of renewing the sacrifice.

Observe, here, that which is very important, that the conscience is cleansed, our sins being expiated, the worshipper drawing nigh by virtue of the sacrifice. The meaning of the Jewish service was that guilt was still there; that of the Christian, that it is gone. As to the former, precious as the type is, the reason is evident: the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin. Therefore those sacrifices have been abolished, and a work of another character (although still a sacrifice) has been accomplished — a work which excludes all other, and all the repetition of the same, because it consists of nothing less than the self-devotedness of the Son of God to accomplish the will of God, and the completion of that to which He was devoted: an act impossible to be repeated, for all His will cannot be accomplished twice, and, were it possible, it would be a testimony of the inadequacy of the first, and so of both.

This is what the Son of God says in this most solemn passage (v. 5-9), in which we are admitted to know, according to the grace of God, that which passed between God the Father and Himself, when He undertook the

fulfillment of the will of God — that which He said, and the eternal counsels of God which He carried into execution. He takes the place of submission and of obedience, of performing the will of another. God would no longer accept the sacrifices that were offered under the law (the four classes of which are here pointed out), He had no pleasure in them. In their stead He had prepared a body for His Son; vast and important truth! for the place of man is obedience. Thus, in taking this place, the Son of God put Himself into the position to obey perfectly. In fact He undertakes the duty of fulfilling all the will of God, be it what it May — a will which is ever “good, acceptable, and perfect.”

The psalm says, in the Hebrew, “Thou hast digged\* ears for me,” translated in the Septuagint, “Thou hast prepared me a body”; words which, as they give the true meaning, are used by the Holy Ghost. For “the ear” is always employed as a sign of the reception of commandments, and the principle of obligation to obey, or the disposition to do so. “He hath opened mine ear morning by morning” (Isaiah 50), that is, has made me listen to His will, be obedient to His commands. The ear was bored, or fastened with an awl to the door, in order to express that the Israelite was attached to the house as a slave, to obey, for ever. Now in taking a body, the Lord took the form of a servant (Philippians 2). Ears were digged for Him. That is to say, He placed Himself in a position in which He had to obey all His Master’s will, whatever it might be. But it is the Lord Himself\*\* who speaks in the passage before us: “Thou,” He says, “hast prepared me a body.”

[\* It is not the same word as to “bore,” or thrust through, in Exodus 21 nor as “open” in Isaiah 50. The one (digged) is to prepare for obedience, the other would be to bind to it for ever, and to subject to the obedience when due. Exodus 21 intimates the blessed truth that, when He had fulfilled His personal service on earth, He would not abandon either His assembly or His people. He is ever God, but ever man, the humbled man, the glorified and reigning man, the subject man, In the joy of eternal perfection.]

[\*\* As throughout the epistle, the Messiah is the subject. In the psalm it is the Messiah who speaks, that is, the Anointed here below. He expresses His patience and faithfulness in the position which He had taken, addressing Jehovah as His God; and He tells us that He took this place willingly, according to the eternal counsels respecting His own Person. For the Person is not changed. But He speaks in the psalm according to the position of obedience which He had taken, saying always, I and me, in speaking of what took place before His incarnation.]



Entering more into detail, He specifies burnt offerings and offerings for sin, sacrifices which had less of the character of communion, and thus had a deeper meaning; but God had no pleasure in them. In a word the Jewish service was already declared by the Spirit to be unacceptable to God. It was all to cease, it was fruitless; no offering that formed part of it was acceptable. No; the counsels of God unfold themselves, but first of all in the heart of the Word, the Son of God, who offers Himself to accomplish the will of God. “Then said I, Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me, to do thy will, O God.” Nothing can be more solemn than thus to lift the veil from that which takes place in heaven between God and the Word who undertook to do His will. Observe that, before He was in the position of obedience, He offers Himself in order to accomplish the will of God, that is to say, of free love for the glory of God, of free will; as One who had the power, He offers Himself. He undertakes obedience, He undertakes to do whatsoever God wills. This is indeed to sacrifice all His own will, but freely and as the effect of His own purpose, although on the occasion of the will of His Father. He must needs be God in order to do this, and to undertake the fulfillment of all that God could will.

We have here the great mystery of this divine intercourse, which remains ever surrounded with its solemn majesty, although it is communicated to us that we may know it. And we ought to know it; for it is thus that we understand the infinite grace and the glory of this work. Before He became man, in the place where only divinity is known, and its eternal counsels and thoughts are communicated between the divine Persons, the Word — as He has declared it to us, in time, by the prophetic Spirit such being the will of God contained in the book of the eternal counsels, He who was able to do it, offered Himself freely to accomplish that will. Submissive to this counsel already arranged for Him, He yet offers Himself in perfect freedom to fulfill it. But in offering He submits, yet at the same time undertakes to do all that God, as God, willed. But also in undertaking to do the will of God, it was in the way of obedience, of submission, and of devotedness. For I might undertake to do the will of another, as free and competent, because I willed the thing; but if I say “to do thy will,” this in itself is absolute and complete submission. And this it is which the Lord, the Word, did. He did it also, declaring that He came in order to do it. He took

a position of obedience by accepting the body prepared for Him. He came to do the will of God.

That of which we have been speaking is continually manifested in the life of Jesus on earth. God shines through His position in the human body; for He was necessarily God in the act itself of His humiliation; and none but God could have undertaken and been found in it; yet He was always, and entirely and perfectly, obedient and dependent on God. That which revealed itself in His existence on earth was the expression of that which was accomplished in the eternal abode, in His own nature. That is to say (and of this Psalm 40 speaks), that which He declares, and that which He was here below, are the same thing, the one in reality in heaven, the other bodily on earth. That which He was here below was but the expression, the living, real, bodily manifestation of what is contained in those divine communications which have been revealed to us, and which were the reality of the position that He assumed.

And it is very important to see these things in the free offer made by divine competency, and not only in their fulfillment in death. It gives quite a different character to the bodily work here below.

In reality, from chapter 1 of this epistle, the Holy Ghost always presents Christ in this way. But this revelation in the psalm was requisite to explain how He became a servant, what the Messiah really was; and to us it opens an immense view of the ways of God, a view, the depths of which — clearly as it is revealed, and through the very clearness of the revelation — display to us things so divine and glorious that we bow the head and veil our faces, as having had part as it were in such communications, on account of the majesty of the Persons whose acts and whose intimate relationships are revealed. It is not here the glory that dazzles us. But even in this poor world there is nothing to which we are greater strangers than the intimacy of those who are, in their modes of life, much above ourselves. What then, when it is that of God! Blessed be His name! there is grace that brings us into it, and that has drawn nigh to us in our weakness. We are then admitted to know this precious truth, that the Lord Jesus undertook of His own free will the accomplishment of all the will of God, and that He was pleased to take the body prepared for Him in order to accomplish it. The love, the devotedness to the glory of God, and the

way in which He undertook to obey, are fully set forth. And this — the fruit of God's eternal counsels — displaces (by its very nature) every provisional sign: and contains, in itself alone, the condition of all relationship with God, and the means by which He glorifies Himself.\*

[\* Remark, also, here not only the substitution of the reality for the ceremonial figures of the law, but the difference of principle. The law required for righteousness that man should do the will of God, and rightly. That was human righteousness. Here Christ undertakes to do it, and has accomplished it in the offering up of Himself. His so doing the will of God is the basis of our relationship with God, and it is done, and we are accepted. As born of God our delight is to do God's will, but it is in love and newness of nature, not in order to be accepted.]

The Word then assumes a body, in order to offer Himself as a sacrifice. Besides the revelation of this devotedness of the Word to accomplish the will of God, the effect of His sacrifice according to the will of God is also set before us.

He came to do the will of Jehovah. Now faith understands that it is by this will of God (that is, by His will who, according to His eternal wisdom, prepared a body for His Son) that those whom He has called unto Himself for salvation are set apart to God, in other words, are sanctified. It is by the will of God that we are set apart for Him (not by our own will), and that by means of the sacrifice offered to God.

We shall observe that the epistle does not here speak of the communication of life, or of a practical sanctification wrought by the Holy Ghost:\* the subject is the Person of Christ ascended on high, and the efficacy of His work. And this is important with regard to sanctification, because it shows that sanctification is a complete setting apart to God, as belonging to Him at the price of the offering of Jesus, a consecration to Him by means of that offering. God took the unclean Jews from among men and set them apart — consecrated them to Himself; so now the called ones, from that nation; and, thank God ourselves also, by means of the offering of Jesus.

[\* It speaks of this last in the exhortations, chapter 12:14. But in the doctrine of the epistle, "sanctification" is not used in the practical sense of what is wrought in us.]

But there is another element, already pointed out, in this offering, the force of which the epistle here applies to believers, namely, that the offering is

“once for all.” It admits of no repetition. If we enjoy the effect of this offering, our sanctification is eternal in its nature. It does not fail. It is never repeated. We belong to God for ever according to the efficacy of this offering. Thus our sanctification, our being set apart to God, has — with regard to the work that accomplished it — all the stability of the will of God, and all the grace from which it sprang; it has, too, in its nature, the perfection of the work itself, by which it was accomplished, and the duration and the constant force of the efficacy of that work. But the effect of this offering is not limited to this setting apart for God. The point already treated contains our consecration by God Himself through the perfectly efficacious offering of Christ fulfilling His will. And now the position which Christ has taken, in consequence of His offering up of Himself, is employed in order clearly to demonstrate the state it has brought us into before God.

The priests among the Jews — for this contrast is still carried on — stood before the altar continually to repeat the same sacrifices which could never take away sins. But this Man, when He had offered one sacrifice for sins, sat down for ever\* at the right hand of God. There — having finished for His own all that regards their presentation without spot to God — He awaits the moment when His enemies shall be made His footstool, according to Psalm 110: “Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” And the Spirit gives us the important reason so infinitely precious to us: “For he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”

[\* The word translated here “for ever” is not the same word that is used for eternally. It has the sense of continuously, without interruption He does not rise up or stand. He is ever seated, His work being finished. He will indeed rise up at the end to come and fetch us, and to judge the world, even as this same passage tells us.]

Here (v. 14) as in verse 12, on which the latter depends, the word “for ever” has the force of permanence — uninterrupted continuity. He is ever seated, we are ever perfected, by virtue of His work and according to the perfect righteousness in which, and conformably to which, He sits at the right hand of God upon His throne, according to that which He is personally there, His acceptance on God’s part being proved by His session at His right hand. And He is there for us.

It is a righteousness suited to the throne of God, yea, the righteousness of the throne. It neither varies nor fails. He is seated there for ever. If then we are sanctified — set apart to God — by this offering according to the will of God Himself, we are also made perfect for God by the same offering, as presented to Him in the Person of Jesus.

We have seen that this position has its origin in the will, the goodwill of God (a will which combines the grace and the purpose of God), and that it has its foundation and present certainty in the accomplishment of the work of Christ, the perfection of which is demonstrated by the session at the right hand of God of Him who accomplished it. But the testimony — for to enjoy this grace we must know it with divine certainty, and the greater it is, the more would our hearts be led to doubt it — the testimony upon which we believe it must be divine. And this it is. The Holy Ghost bears witness to us of it. The will of God is the source of the work; Christ, the Son of God, accomplished it; the Holy Ghost bears witness to us of it. And here the application to the people, called by grace and spared, is in consequence fully set forth, not merely the fulfillment of the work. The Holy Ghost bears us witness. “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”

Blessed position! The certainty that God will never remember our sins and iniquities is founded on the steadfast will of God, on the perfect offering of Christ, now consequently seated at the right hand of God, and on the sure testimony of the Holy Ghost. It is a matter of faith that God will never remember our sins.

We may remark here the way in which the covenant is introduced; for although, as writing to “the holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling,” he says, “a witness to us,” the form of his address is always that of an epistle to the Hebrews (believers, of course, but Hebrews, still bearing the character of God’s people). He does not speak of the covenant in a direct way, as a privilege in which Christians had a direct part. The Holy Ghost, he says, declares, “I will remember no more,” etc. It is this which he quotes. He only alludes to the new covenant, leaving it aside consequently as to all present application. For after having said, “This is the covenant,” etc., the testimony is cited as that of the Holy Ghost, to prove the capital point which he was treating, that is, that God remembers

our sins no more. But he alludes to the covenant (already known to the Jews as declared before of God) which gave the authority of the scriptures to this testimony, that God remembered no more the sins of His people who are sanctified and admitted into His favor, and which, at the same time, presented these two thoughts; first, that this complete pardon did not exist under the first covenant: and, second, that the door is left open for the blessing of the nation when the new covenant shall be formally established.

Another practical consequence is drawn: sins being remitted, there is no more oblation for sin. The one sacrifice having obtained remission, no others can be offered in order to obtain it. Remembrance of this one sacrifice there may indeed be, whatever its character; but a sacrifice to take away the sins which are already taken away, there cannot be. We are therefore in reality on entirely new ground — on that of the fact, that by the sacrifice of Christ our sins are altogether put away, and that for us, who are sanctified and partakers of the heavenly calling, a perfect and everlasting permanent cleansing has been made, remission granted, eternal redemption obtained. So that we are, in the eyes of God, without sin, on the ground of the perfection of the work of Christ, who is seated at His right hand, who has entered into the true holiest, into heaven itself, to sit there because His work is accomplished.

Thus all liberty is ours to enter into the holy place (all boldness) by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, that is His flesh, to admit us without spot into the presence of God Himself, who is there revealed. For us the veil is rent, and that which rent the veil in order to admit us has likewise put away the sin which shut us out.

We have also a great High Priest over the house of God, as we have seen, who represents us in the holy place.

On these truths are founded the exhortations that follow. One word before we enter on them, as to the relation that exists between perfect righteousness and the priesthood. There are many souls who use the priesthood as the means of obtaining pardon when they have failed. They go to Christ as a priest, that He may intercede for them and obtain the pardon which they desire, but for which they dare not ask God in a direct way. These souls — sincere as they are — have not liberty to enter into

the holy place. They take refuge with Christ that they may afresh be brought into the presence of God. Their condition practically is that in which a pious Jew stood. They have lost, or rather they have never had by faith, the real consciousness of their position before God in virtue of the sacrifice of Christ. I do not speak here of all the privileges of the assembly: we have seen that the epistle does not speak of them. The position it makes for believers is this: those whom it addresses are not viewed as placed in heaven, although partakers of the heavenly calling; but a perfect redemption is accomplished, all guilt entirely put away for the people of God, who remembers their sins no more. The conscience is made perfect — they have no more conscience of sins — by virtue of the work accomplished once for all. There is no more question of sin; that is, of its imputation, of its being upon them before God, between them and God. There cannot be, because of the work accomplished upon the cross. The conscience therefore is perfect; their Representative and High Priest is in heaven, a witness there to the work already accomplished for them.

Thus, although the epistle does not present them as in the holiest, as sitting there — like in the epistle to the Ephesians — they have full liberty, entire boldness, to enter into it. The question of imputation no longer exists. Their sins have been imputed to Christ. But He is now in heaven — a proof that the sins are blotted out for ever. Believers therefore enter with entire liberty into the presence of God Himself, and that always — having no more for ever any conscience of sins.

For what purpose then is priesthood? What is to be done with respect to the sins we commit? They interrupt our communion; but they make no change in our position before God, nor in the testimony rendered by the presence of Christ at the right hand of God. Nor do they raise any question as to imputation. They are sins against that position, or against God, measured by the relationship we are in to God, as in it. For sin is measured by the conscience according to our position. The perpetual presence of Christ at God's right hand has this twofold effect for us: first, perfected for ever we have no more conscience of sins before God, we are accepted; second, as priest He obtains grace to help in time of need, that we may not sin. But the present exercise of priesthood by Christ does not refer to sins: we have through His work no more conscience of sins, are perfected for ever. There is another truth connected with this, found in 1

John 2: we have an Advocate\* with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. On this our communion with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ is founded and secured. Our sins are not imputed, for the propitiation is in all its value before God. But by sin communion is interrupted; our righteousness is not altered — for that is Christ Himself at God's right hand in virtue of His work; nor is grace changed, and "he is the propitiation for our sins"; but the heart has got away from God, communion is interrupted. But grace acts in virtue of perfect righteousness, and by the advocacy of Christ, on behalf of him who has failed; and his soul is restored to communion. Nor is it that we go to Jesus for this; He goes, even if we sin, to God for us. His presence there is the witness of an unchangeable righteousness which is ours, His intercession maintains us in the path we have to walk in, or as our Advocate He restores the communion which is founded on that righteousness. Our access to God is always open. Sin interrupts our enjoyment of it, the heart is not in communion; the advocacy of Jesus is the means of rousing the conscience by the action of the Spirit and the word, and we return (humbling ourselves) into the presence of God Himself. The priesthood and advocacy of Christ refer to the condition of an imperfect and feeble, or failing, creature upon earth, reconciling it with the perfectness of the place and glory in which divine righteousness sets us. The soul is maintained steadfast or restored.

[\* There is a difference in detail here; but it does not affect my present subject. The High Priest has to do with our access to God; the Advocate with our communion with the Father and His government of us as children. The epistle to the Hebrews treats of the ground of access and shows us to be perfected for ever; and the priestly intercession does not apply to sins in that respect. It brings mercy and grace to help in time of need here, but we are perfected for ever before God. But communion is necessarily interrupted by the least sin or idle thought — yea, really had been, practically if not judicially, before the idle thought was there. Here the advocacy of John comes in: "If any man sin," and the soul is restored. But there is never imputation to the believer.]

Exhortations follow. Having the right thus to approach God, let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith. This is the only thing that honors the efficacy of Christ's work, and the love which has thus brought us to enjoy God. In the words that follow, allusion is made to the consecration of the priests — a natural allusion, as drawing near to God in the holiest is the subject. They were sprinkled with blood and washed



with water, and then they drew nigh to serve God. Still, although I doubt not of the allusion to the priests, it is quite natural that baptism should have given rise to it. The anointing is not spoken of here — it is the power or privilege of the moral right to draw nigh.

Again, we may notice that, as to the foundation of the truth, this is the ground on which Israel will stand in the last days. In Christ in heaven will not be their place, nor the possession of the Holy Ghost as uniting the believer to Christ in heaven; but the blessing will be founded on water and on blood. God will remember their sins no more; and they will be washed in the clean water of the word.

The second exhortation is to persevere in the profession of the hope without wavering. He who made the promises is faithful.

Not only should we have this confidence in God for ourselves, but we are also to consider one another for mutual encouragement; and, at the same time, not to fail in the public and common profession of faith, pretending to maintain it, while avoiding the open identification of oneself with the Lord's people in the difficulties connected with the profession of this faith before the world. Besides, this public confession had a fresh motive in that the day drew nigh. We see that it is the judgment which is here presented as the thing looked for — in order that it may act on the conscience, and guard Christians from turning back to the world, and from the influence of the fear of man — rather than the Lord's coming to take up His own people. Verse 26 is connected with the preceding paragraph (23-25) the last words of which suggest the warning of verse 26; which is founded, moreover, on the doctrine of these two chapters (9 and 10), with regard to the sacrifice. He insists on perseverance in a full confession of Christ, for His one sacrifice once offered was the only one. If any who had professed to know its value abandoned it, there was no other sacrifice to which he could have recourse, neither could it be ever repeated. There remained no more sacrifice for sin. All sins were pardoned by the efficacy of this sacrifice: but if, after having known the truth, they were to choose sin instead, there was no other sacrifice by virtue even of the perfection of that of Christ. Nothing but judgment remained. Such a professor, having had the knowledge of the truth and having abandoned it, would assume the character of an adversary.

The case, then, here supposed is the renunciation of the confession of Christ, deliberately preferring — after having known the truth — to walk according to one's own will in sin. This is evident, both from that which precedes and from verse 29.

Thus we have (chaps. 6, 10) the two great privileges of Christianity, what distinguishes it from Judaism, presented in order to warn those who made profession of the former, that the renunciation of the truth, after enjoying these advantages, was fatal; for if these means of salvation were renounced, there was no other. These privileges were the manifested presence and power of the Holy Ghost, and the offering which, by its intrinsic and absolute value, left no place for any other. Both of these possessed a mighty efficacy, which, while it gave divine spring and force, and the manifestation of the presence of God on the one hand, made known on the other hand the eternal redemption and the perfection of the worshipper; leaving no means for repentance, if any one abandoned the manifested and known power of that presence; no place for another sacrifice (which, moreover, would have denied the efficacy of the first), after the perfect work of God in salvation, perfect whether with regard to redemption, or to the presence of God by the Spirit in the midst of His own. Nothing remained but judgment.

They who despised the law of Moses died without mercy. What then would not those deserve at the hand of God, who trod under foot the Son of God, counted the blood of the covenant, by which they had been sanctified, as a common thing, and did despite to the Spirit of grace? It was not simple disobedience, however evil that might be; it was contempt of the grace of God, and of that which He had done, in the Person of Jesus, in order to deliver us from the consequences of disobedience. On the one hand, what was there left, if with the knowledge of what it was, they renounced this? On the other hand, how could they escape judgment? for they know a God who had said that vengeance belonged unto Him, and that He would recompense; and, again the Lord would judge His people.

Observe here the way in which sanctification is attributed to the blood; and, also, that professors are treated as belonging to the people. The blood, received by faith, consecrates the soul to God; but it is here viewed also as an outward means for setting apart the people as a people. Every

individual who had owned Jesus to be the Messiah, and the blood to be the seal and foundation of an everlasting covenant available for eternal cleansing and redemption on the part of God, acknowledging himself to be set apart for God, by this means, as one of the people — every such individual would, if he renounced it, renounce it as such: and there was no other way of sanctifying him. The former system had evidently lost its power for him, and the true one he had abandoned. This is the reason why it is said, “having received the knowledge of the truth.”

Nevertheless he hopes better things, for fruit, the sign of life, was there. He reminds them how much they had suffered for the truth, and that they had even received joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing that they had a better and an abiding portion in heaven. They were not to cast away this confidence, the reward of which would be great. For in truth they needed patience, in order that, after having done the will of God, they might receive the effect of the promise. And He who is to come will come soon.

It is to this life of patience and perseverance that the chapter applies. But there is a principle which is the strength of this life, and which characterises it. In the midst of the difficulties of the christian walk, the just shall live by faith; and if anyone draws back, God will have no pleasure in him. “But,” says the author, placing himself as ever in the midst of the believers, “we are not of them who draw back, but of them that believe unto the saving of the soul.” Thereupon he describes the action of this faith, encouraging believers by the example of the elders who had acquired their renown by walking according to the same principle as that by which the faithful were now called to walk.

It is not a definition of this principle, that the epistle gives us at the commencement of chapter 11, but a declaration of its powers and action. Faith realizes (gives substance to) that which we hope for, and is a demonstration to the soul of that which we do not see.

There is much more order than is generally thought in the series given here of examples of the action of faith, although this order is not the principal object. I will point out its leading features.

First with regard to creation. Lost in reasonings, and not knowing God, the human mind sought out endless solutions of existence. Those who have read the cosmogonies of the ancients know how many different systems, each more absurd than the other, have been invented for that which the introduction of God, by faith, renders perfectly simple. Modern science, with a less active and more practical mind, stops at second causes; and it is but little occupied with God. Geology has taken the place of the cosmogony of the Hindoos, Egyptians, Orientals and philosophers. To the believer the thought is clear and simple; his mind is assured and intelligent by faith. God, by His word, called all things into existence. The universe is not a producing cause; it is itself a creature acting by a law imposed upon it. It is One having authority who has spoken; His word has divine efficacy. He speaks, and the thing is. We feel that this is worthy of God; for, when once God is brought in, all is simple. Shut Him out, and man is lost in the efforts of his own imagination, which can neither create nor arrive at the knowledge of a Creator, because it only works with the power of a creature. Before, therefore, the details of the present form of creation are entered upon, the word simply says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Whatever may have taken place between that and chaos forms no part of revelation. It is distinct from the special action of the deluge, which is made known to us. The beginning of Genesis does not give a history of the details of creation itself, nor the history of the universe. It gives the fact that in the beginning God created; and afterwards, the things that regard man on the earth. The angels even are not there. Of the stars it is only said, "He made the stars also"; when, we are not told.

By faith then we believe that the worlds were created by the word of God.

But sin has come in, and righteousness has to be found for fallen man, in order that he may stand before God. God has given a Lamb for the sacrifice. But here we have set before us, not the gift on God's part, but the soul drawing near to Him by faith.

By faith then Abel offers to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain — a sacrifice which (founded on the revelation already made by God) was offered in the intelligence which a conscience taught of God possessed, with regard to the position in which he who offered was standing. Death

and judgment had come in by sin, to man insupportable, although he must undergo them. He must go therefore to God, confessing this; but he must go with a substitute which grace has given. He must go with blood, the witness at the same time both of the judgment and of the perfect grace of God. Doing this, he was in the truth, and this truth was righteousness and grace. He approaches God and puts the sacrifice between himself and God. He receives the testimony that he is righteous — righteous according to the righteous judgment of God. For the sacrifice was in connection with the righteousness that had condemned man, and owned too the perfect value of that which was done in it. The testimony is to his offering; but Abel is righteous before God. Nothing can be more clear, more precious on this point. It is not only the sacrifice which is accepted, but Abel who comes with the sacrifice. He receives from God this testimony, that he is righteous. Sweet and blessed consolation! But the testimony is made to his gifts, so that he possessed all the certainty of acceptance according to the value of the sacrifice offered. In going to God by the sacrifice of Jesus, not only am I righteous (I receive the testimony that I am righteous), but this testimony is made to my offering; and therefore my righteousness has the value and the perfection of the offering; that is, of Christ offering Himself to God. The fact that we receive testimony on God's part that we are righteous, and at the same time that the testimony is made to the gift which we offer (not to the condition in which we are), is of infinite value to us. We are now before God according to the perfection of Christ's work. We walk with God thus.

By faith, death having been the means of my acceptance before God, all that belongs to the old man is abolished for faith; the power and the rights of death are entirely destroyed — Christ has undergone them. Thus, if it please God, we go to heaven without even passing through death (compare 2 Cor:1-4). God did this for Enoch, for Elijah, as a testimony. Not only are sins put away, and righteousness established by the work of Christ, but the rights and power of him who has the power of death are entirely destroyed. Death may happen to us — we are by nature liable to it; but we possess a life which is outside its jurisdiction. Death, if it come, is but gain to us; and although nothing but the power of God Himself can raise or transform the body, this power has been manifested in Jesus, and has already wrought in us by quickening us (compare Ephesians 1:19); and it

works in us now in the power of deliverance from sin, from the law, and from the flesh. Death, as a power of the enemy, is conquered; it is become a “gain” to faith, instead of being a judgment on nature. Life, the power of God in life, works in holiness and in obedience here below, and declares itself in the resurrection, or in the transformation of the body. It is a witness of power with regard to Christ in Romans 1:4.

But there is another very sweet consideration to be noticed here. Enoch received testimony that he pleased God, before he was translated. This is very important and very precious. If we walk with God, we have the testimony that we please Him; we have the sweetness of communion with God, the testimony of His Spirit, His intercourse with us in the sense of His presence, the consciousness of walking according to His word, which we know to be approved by Him — in a word, a life which, spent with Him and before Him by faith, is spent in the light of His countenance, and in the enjoyment of the communications of His grace and of a sure testimony, coming from Himself, that we are pleasing to Him. A child who walks with a kind father and converses with him, his conscience reproaching him with nothing — does he not enjoy the sense of his parent’s favor?

In figure Enoch here represents the position of the saints who compose the assembly. He is taken up to heaven by virtue of a complete victory over death. By the exercise of sovereign grace he is outside the government and the ordinary deliverance of God. He bears testimony by the Spirit to the judgment of the world, but he does not go through it (Jude 14, 15). A walk like that of Enoch has God for its object; His existence is realised — the great business of life, which in the world is spent as if man did everything — and the fact that He is interested in the walk of men, that He takes account of it, in order to reward those who diligently seek Him.

Noah is found in the scene of the government of this world. He does not warn others of the coming judgments as one who is outside them, although he is a preacher of righteousness. He is warned himself and for himself: he is in the circumstances to which the warning relates. It is the spirit of prophecy. He is moved by fear, and he builds an ark to the saving of his house. He thus condemned the world. Enoch had not to build an ark in order to pass safely through the flood. He was not in it: God translated

him — exceptionally. Noah is preserved (heir of the righteousness which is by faith) for a future world. There is a general principle which accepts the testimony of God respecting the judgment that will fall upon men, and the means provided by God for escaping it: this belongs to every believer.

But there is something more precise. Abel has the testimony that he is righteous; Enoch walks with God, pleases God, and is exempted from the common lot of humanity, proclaiming as from above the fate that awaits men, and the coming of Him who will execute the judgment. He goes forward to the accomplishment of the counsels of God. But neither Abel nor Enoch, thus viewed, condemned the world as that in the midst of which they were journeying, receiving themselves the warning addressed to those who were dwellers therein. This was Noah's case; the prophet, although delivered, is in the midst of the judged people. The assembly is outside them. Noah's ark condemned the world; the testimony of God was enough for faith, and he inherits a world that had been destroyed, and (what belongs to all believers) righteousness by faith, on which the new world too is founded. This is the case of the Jewish remnant in the last days. They pass through the judgments, out of which we, as not belonging to the world, have been taken. Warned themselves of God's way of government in the earth, they will be witnesses to the world of the coming judgments, and will be heirs of the righteousness which is by faith, and witnesses to it in a new world, wherein righteousness will be accomplished in judgment by Him who is come, and whose throne will uphold the world in which Noah himself failed. The words, "heir of the righteousness which is by faith," point out, I think, that this faith which had governed a few was summed up in his person, and that the whole unbelieving world was condemned. The witness of this faith before judgment, Noah passes through it: and when the world is renewed, he is a public witness to the blessing of God that rests on faith, although outwardly all is changed. Thus Enoch represents the saints of the present time; Noah, the Jewish remnant.\*

[\* Indeed all that are spared for the world to come. Their state is expressed in the end of Revelation 7, as that of the Jews in the first verses of chapter 14.]

The Spirit, after establishing the great fundamental principles of faith in action, goes on (v. 8) to produce examples of the divine life in detail, always in connection with Jewish knowledge, with that which the heart of

a Hebrew could not fail to own; and, at the same time, in connection with the object of the epistle and with the wants of Christians among the Hebrews.

In the previous case we have seen a faith which, after owning a Creator-God, recognises the great principles of the relations of man with God, and that onwards to the end upon earth.

In that which follows, we have first the patience of faith when it does not possess, but trusts God and waits, assured of fulfillment. This is from verse 8 to 22. We may subdivide it thus: first, the faith which takes the place of strangership on earth, and maintains it, because something better is desired; and which, in spite of weakness, finds the strength that is requisite in order to the fulfillment of the promises. This is from verses 8 to 16. Its effect is entrance into the joy of a heavenly hope. Strangers in the land of promise, and not enjoying the fulfillment of promises here below, they wait for more excellent things — things which God prepares on high for those who love Him. For such He has prepared a city. In unison with God in His own thoughts, their desires (through grace) answering to the things in which He takes delight, they are the objects of His peculiar regard. He is not ashamed to be called their God. Abraham not only followed God into a land that He showed him, but, a stranger there, and not possessing the land of promise, he is, by the mighty grace of God, exalted to the sphere of His thoughts; and, enjoying communion with God and the communications of His grace, he rests upon God for the time present, accepts his position of strangership on earth, and, as the portion of his faith, waits for the heavenly city of which God is the builder and the founder. There was not, so to speak, an open revelation of what was the subject of this hope, as was the case with that by which Abraham was called of God; but walking closely enough with God to know that which was enjoyed in His presence, and being conscious that he had not received the fulfillment of the promise, he lays hold of the better things, and waits for them, although only seeing them afar off, and remains a stranger upon earth, unmindful of the country whence he came out.

The special application of these first principles of faith to the case of the Hebrew Christians is evident. They are the normal life of faith for all.



The second character of faith presented in this part is entire confidence in the fulfillment of the promises — a confidence maintained in spite of all that might tend to destroy it. This is from verse 17 to 22.

We next find, the second great division, that faith makes its way through all the difficulties that oppose its progress (v. 23-27). And from verse 28 to 31 faith displays itself in a trust that reposes on God with regard to the use of the means which He sets before us, and of which nature cannot avail itself. Finally, there is the energy in general, of which faith is the source, and the sufferings that characterise the walk of faith.

\* This general character belongs to all the examples mentioned, namely, that they who have exercised faith have not received the fulfillment of the promise; the application of which to the state of the Hebrew Christians is evident. Further, these illustrious heroes of faith, however honored they might be among the Jews, did not enjoy the privileges that Christians possessed. God in His counsels had reserved something better for us.

[\* In general we may say that verses 8-22 are faith resting assured on the promise, the patience of faith: verse 23 to the end, faith resting on God for the activities and difficulties faith leads to, the energy of faith.]

Let us notice some details. Abraham's faith shows itself by a thorough trust in God. Called to leave his own people, breaking the ties of nature, he obeys. He knows not whither he is going: enough for him that God would show him the place. God, having brought him thither, gives him nothing. He dwells there content, in perfect reliance on God. He was a gainer by it. He waited for a city that had foundations. He openly confesses that he is a stranger and a pilgrim on earth (Genesis 23:4). Thus, in spirit, he draws nearer to God. Although he possesses nothing, his affections are engaged. He desires a better country, and attaches himself to God more immediately and entirely. He has no desire to return into his own country; he seeks a country. Such is the Christian. In offering up Isaac there was that absolute confidence in God which, at His command, can renounce even God's own promises as possessed after the flesh, sure that God would restore them through the exercise of His power, overcoming death and every obstacle.

It is thus that Christ renounced His rights as Messiah, and went even into death, committing Himself to the will of God and trusting in Him; and received everything in resurrection. And this the Hebrew Christians had to

do, with respect to the Messiah and the promises made to Israel. But, if there is simplicity of faith, for us the Jordan is dry, nor could we indeed have passed it if the Lord had not passed on before.

Observe here that, when trusting in God and giving up all for Him, we always gain, and we learn something more of the ways of His power: for in renouncing according to His will anything already received, we ought to expect from the power of God that He will bestow something else.

Abraham renounces the promise after the flesh. He sees the city which has foundations; he can desire a heavenly country. He gives up Isaac, in whom were the promises: he learns resurrection, for God is infallibly faithful. The promises were in Isaac: therefore God must restore him to Abraham, and by resurrection, if he offered him in sacrifice.

In Isaac faith distinguishes between the portion of God's people according to His election, and that of man having birthrights according to nature. This is the knowledge of the ways of God in blessing, and in judgment.

By faith Jacob, a stranger and feeble, having nothing but the staff with which he had crossed the Jordan, worships God, and announces the double portion of the heir of Israel, of the one whom his brethren rejected — a type of the Lord, the heir of all things. This lays the ground of worship.

By faith Joseph, a stranger, the representative here of Israel far from his own country, reckons on the fulfillment of the earthly promises.\*

[\* Observe that in these cases we find the rights of Christ in resurrection; the judgment of nature, and the blessing of faith, through grace; the inheritance of all things heavenly and earthly by Christ; and Israel's future return to their own land.]

These are the expressions of faith in the faithfulness of God, in the future fulfillment of His promise. In that which follows we have the faith which surmounts every difficulty that arises in the path of the man of God, in the way that God marks out for him as he journeys on towards the enjoyment of the promises.

The faith of the parents of Moses makes them disregard the king's cruel command, and they conceal their infant; whom God, in answer to their faith, preserved by extraordinary means when there was no other way to

save it. Faith does not reason; it acts from its own point of view, and leaves the result to God.

But the means which God used for the preservation of Moses placed him within a little of the highest position in the kingdom. He there came to be possessed of all the acquirements which that period could bestow on a man distinguished alike by his energy and his character. But faith does its work, and inspires divine affections which do not look to surrounding circumstances for a guide of action, even when those circumstances may have owned their origin to the most remarkable providences.

Faith has its own objects, supplied by God Himself, and governs the heart with a view to those objects. It gives us a place and relationships which rule the whole life, and leave no room for other motives and other spheres of affection which would divide the heart; for the motives and affections which govern faith are given by God, and given by Him in order to form and govern the heart.

Verses 24-26 develop this point. It is a very important principle; for we often hear Providence alleged as a reason for not walking by faith. Never was there a more remarkable Providence than that which placed Moses in the court of Pharaoh; and it gained its object. It would not have done so if Moses had not abandoned the position into which that Providence had brought him. But it was faith (that is to say, the divine affections which God had created in his heart), and not Providence as a rule and motive, which produced the effect for which Providence had preserved and prepared him. Providence (thanks be to God!) governs circumstances; faith governs the heart and the conduct.

The reward which God has promised comes in here as an avowed object in the sphere of faith. It is not the motive power; but it sustains and encourages the heart that is acting by faith, in view of the object which God presents to our affections. It thus takes the heart away from the present, from the influence of the things that surround us (whether they are things that attract or that tend to intimidate us), and elevates the heart and character of him who walks by faith, and confirms him in a path of devotedness which will lead him to the end at which he aims.

A motive outside that which is present to us is the secret of stability and of true greatness. We may have an object with regard to which we act; but we need a motive outside that object — a divine motive — to enable us to act in a godly way respecting it.

Faith realizes also (v. 27) the intervention of God without seeing Him; and thus delivers from all fear of the power of man — the enemy of His people. But the thought of God's intervention brings the heart into a greater difficulty than even the fear of man. If His people are to be delivered, God must intervene, and that in judgment. But they, as well as their enemies, are sinners; and the consciousness of sin and of deserving judgment necessarily destroys confidence in Him who is the Judge. Dare they see Him come to manifest His power in judgment (for this it is, in fact, which must take place for the deliverance of His people)? Is God for us — the heart asks — this God who is coming in judgment? But God has provided the means of securing safety in the presence of judgment (v. 28); a means apparently contemptible and useless, yet which in reality is the only one that, by glorifying Him with regard to the evil of which we are guilty, has power to afford shelter from the judgment which He executes.

Faith recognised the testimony of God by trusting to the efficacy of the blood sprinkled on the door, and could, in all security, let God come in judgment — God who, seeing the blood, would pass over His believing people. By faith Moses kept the passover. Observe here that, by the act of putting the blood on the door, the people acknowledged that they were as much the objects of the just judgment of God as the Egyptians. God had given them that which preserved them from it; but it was because they were guilty and deserved it. No one can stand before God.

Verse 29. But the power of God is manifested, and manifested in judgment. Nature, the enemies of God's people, think to pass through this judgment dry-shod, like those who are sheltered by redeeming power from the righteous vengeance of God. But the judgment swallows them up in the very same place in which the people find deliverance — a principle of marvelous import. There, where the judgment of God is, even there is the deliverance. Believers have truly experienced this in Christ. The cross is death and judgment, the two terrible consequences of sin, the lot of sinful man. To us they are the deliverance provided of God. By and in them we

are delivered, and (in Christ) we pass through and are out of their reach. Christ died and is risen; and faith brings us, by means of that which should have been our eternal ruin, into a place where death and judgment are left behind, and where our enemies can no longer reach us. We go through without their touching us. Death and judgment shield us from the enemy. They are our security. But we enter into a new sphere, we live by the effect not only of Christ's death, but of His resurrection.

Those who, in the mere power of nature, think to pass through (they who speak of death and judgment and Christ, taking the christian position, and thinking to pass through, although the power of God in redemption is not with them) are swallowed up.

With respect to the Jews, this event will have an earthly antitype; for in fact the day of God's judgment on earth will be the deliverance of Israel, who will have been brought to repentance.

This deliverance at the Red Sea goes beyond the protection of the blood in Egypt. There God coming in the expression of His holiness, executing judgment upon evil, what they needed was to be sheltered from that judgment — to be protected from the righteous judgment of God Himself. And, by the blood, God, thus coming to execute judgment, was shut out, and the people were placed in safety before the Judge. This judgment had the character of the eternal judgment. And God had the character of a Judge.

At the Red Sea it was not merely deliverance from judgment hanging over them; God was for the people, active in love and in power for them.\* The deliverance was an actual deliverance: they came out of that condition in which they had been enslaved, God's own power bringing them unhurt through that which otherwise must have been their destruction. Thus, in our case, it is Christ's death and resurrection, in which we participate, the redemption which He therein accomplished,\*\* which introduces us into an entirely new condition altogether outside that of nature. We are no longer in the flesh.

[\* Stand still, says Moses, and see the salvation of Jehovah.]

[\*\* Crossing the Jordan represents the believer being set at liberty, and intelligently entering by faith into the heavenlies; it is conscious death and

resurrection with Christ. The Red Sea is the power of redemption by Christ.]

In principle the earthly deliverance of the Jewish nation (the Jewish remnant) will be the same. Founded on the power of the risen Christ, and on the propitiation wrought out by His death, that deliverance will be accomplished by God, who will intervene on behalf of those that turn to Him by faith: at the same time that His adversaries (who are those also of His people) shall be destroyed by the very judgment which is the safeguard of the people whom they have oppressed.

Verse 30. Yet all difficulties were not overcome because redemption was accomplished, deliverance effected. But the God of deliverance was with them; difficulties disappear before Him. That which is a difficulty to man is none to Him. Faith trusts in Him, and uses means which only serve to express that trust. The walls of Jericho fall down at the sound of trumpets made of rams' horns, after Israel had compassed the city seven days, sounding these trumpets seven times.

Rahab, in presence of all the as yet unimpaired strength of the enemies of God and His people, identifies herself with the latter before they had gained one victory, because she felt that God was with them. A stranger to them (as to the flesh), she by faith escaped the judgment which God executed upon her people.

Verse 32. Details are now no longer entered into. Israel (although individuals had still to act by faith), being established in the land of promise, furnished less occasion to develop examples of the principles on which faith acted. The Spirit speaks in a general way of these examples in which faith reappeared under various characters and energy of patience, and sustained souls under all kinds of suffering. Their glory was with God, the world was not worthy of them. Nevertheless they had received nothing of the fulfillment of the promises; they had to live by faith, as well as the Hebrews, to whom the epistle was addressed. The latter, however, had privileges which were in no wise possessed by believers of former days. Neither the one nor the other was brought to perfection, that is, to the heavenly glory, unto which God has called us, and in which they are to participate. Abraham and others waited for this glory; they never possessed it: God would not give it them without us. But He has not

called us by the same revelations only as those which He made to them. For the days of the rejected Messiah He had reserved some better thing. Heavenly things have become things of the present time, things fully revealed and actually possessed in spirit, by the union of the saints with Christ, and present access into the holiest through the blood of Christ.

We have not to do with a promise and a distinct view of a place approached from without, entrance to which was not yet granted, so that relationship with God would not be founded on entrance within the veil — entrance into His own presence. We now go in with boldness. We belong to heaven; our citizenship is there; we are at home there. Heavenly glory is our present portion, Christ having gone in as our Forerunner. We have in heaven a Christ who is man glorified. This Abraham had not. He walked on earth with a heavenly mind, waiting for a city, feeling that nothing else would satisfy the desires which God had awakened in his heart; but he could not be connected with heaven by means of a Christ actually sitting there in glory. This is our present portion. We can even say that we are united to Him there. The Christian's position is quite different from that of Abraham. God had reserved some better thing for us.

The Spirit does not here develop the whole extent of this “better thing,” because the assembly is not His subject. He presents the general thought to the Hebrews to encourage them, that believers of the present day have special privileges, which they enjoy by faith, but which did not belong even to the faith of believers in former days.

We shall be perfected, that is to say, glorified together in resurrection; but there is a special portion which belongs to the saints now, and which did not belong to the patriarchs. The fact that Christ, as man, is in heaven after having accomplished redemption, and that the Holy Ghost, by whom we are united to Christ, is on earth, made this superiority granted to Christians easily understood. Accordingly even the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than the greatest of those who preceded it.

**CHAPTER 12.** The epistle now enters on the practical exhortations that flow from its doctrinal instruction, with reference to the dangers peculiar to the Hebrew Christians — instruction suited throughout to inspire them with courage. Surrounded with a cloud of witnesses like these of chapter 11, who all declared the advantages of a life of faith in promises still

unfulfilled, they ought to feel themselves impelled to follow their steps, running with patience the race set before them, and above all looking away from every difficulty\* to Jesus, who had run the whole career of faith, sustained by the joy that was set before Him, and, having reached the goal, had taken His seat in glory at the right hand of God.

[\* It is not insensibility to them, but, when they are felt to be there, looking from them to Christ. This is the secret of faith. "Be careful for nothing" need not have been said, if nothing had been there calculated to awaken care. Abraham considered not his body now dead.]

This passage presents the Lord, not as He who bestows faith, but as He who has Himself run the whole career of faith. Others had travelled a part of the road, had surmounted some difficulties; the obedience and the perseverance of the Lord had been subjected to every trial of which human nature is susceptible. Men, the adversary, the being forsaken of God, everything was against Him. His disciples flee when He is in danger, His intimate friend betrays Him; He looks for some one to have compassion on Him and finds no one. The fathers (of whom we read in the previous chapter) trusted in God and were delivered, but as for Jesus, He was a worm, and no man; His throat was dry with crying. His love for us, His obedience to His Father, surmounted all. He carries off the victory by submission, and takes His seat in a glory exalted in proportion to the greatness of His abasement and obedience, the only just reward for having perfectly glorified God where He had been dishonored by sin. The joy and the rewards that are set before us are never the motives of the walk of faith — we know this well with regard to Christ, but it is not the less true in our own case — they are the encouragement of those who walk in it.

Jesus, then, who has attained the glory due to Him, becomes an example to us in the sufferings through which He passed in attaining it; therefore we are neither to lose courage nor to grow weary. We have not yet, like Him, lost our lives in order to glorify God and to serve Him. The way in which the apostle engages them to disentangle themselves from every hindrance, whether sin or difficulty, is remarkable; as though they had nothing to do but to cast them off as useless weights. And in fact, when we look at Jesus, nothing is easier; when we are not looking at Him, nothing more impossible.



There are two things to be cast off: every weight, and the sin that would entangle our feet (for he speaks of one who is running in the race). The flesh, the human heart, is occupied with cares and difficulties; and the more we think of them, the more we are burdened by them. It is enticed by the object of its desires, it does not free itself from them. The conflict is with a heart that loves the thing against which we strive; we do not separate ourselves from it in thought. When looking at Jesus, the new man is active; there is a new object, which unburdens and detaches us from every other by means of a new affection which has its place in a new nature: and in Jesus Himself, to whom we look, there is a positive power which sets us free.

It is by casting it all off in an absolute way that the thing is easy — by looking at that which fills the heart with other things, and occupies it in a different sphere, where a new object and a new nature act upon each other; and in that object there is a positive power which absorbs the heart and shuts out all objects that act merely on the old nature. What is felt to be a weight is easily cast off. Everything is judged of by its bearing on the object we aim at. If I run in a race and all my thought is the prize, a bag of gold is readily cast away. It is a weight. But we must look to Jesus. Only in Him can we cast off every hindrance easily and without reservation. We cannot combat sin by the flesh.

But there is another class of trials that come from without: they are not to be cast off, they must be born. Christ, as we have seen, went through them. We have not like Him resisted even to the shedding of our blood rather than fail in faithfulness and obedience. Now God acts in these trials as a father. He chastises us. They come perhaps, as in the case of Job, from the enemy, but the hand and the wisdom of God are in them. He chastises those whom He loves. We must therefore neither despise the chastisement nor be discouraged by it. We must not despise it, for He does not chastise without a motive or a cause (moreover, it is God who does it); nor must we be discouraged, for He does it in love.

If we lose our life for the testimony of the Lord and in resisting sin, the warfare is ended; and this is not chastisement, but the glory of suffering with Christ. Death in this case is the negation of sin. He who has died is free from sin; he who has suffered in the flesh has done with sin. But up to

that point, the flesh in practice (for we have a right to reckon ourselves dead) is not yet destroyed; and God knows how to unite the manifestation of the faithfulness of the new man who suffers for the Lord, with the discipline by which the flesh is mortified. For example, Paul's thorn in the flesh united these two things. It was painful to him in the exercise of his ministry, for it was something that tended to make him contemptible when preaching (and this he endured for the Lord's sake), but at the same time it kept his flesh in check.

Verse 9. Now we are subject to our natural parents, who discipline us after their own will: how much more then to the Father of spirits,\* who makes us partakers of His own holiness! Observe here the grace that is appealed to. We have seen how much the Hebrews needed warning — their tendency was to fail in the career of faith. The means of preventing this is doubtless not to spare warning, but yet to bring the soul fully into connection with grace. This alone can give strength and courage through confidence in God.

[\* "Father of spirits" is simply in contrast with "fathers of our flesh."]

We are not come to Mount Sinai, to the law which makes demands on us, but to Sion, where God manifested His power in re-establishing Israel by His grace in the person of the elect king, when, as to the responsibility of the people, all was entirely lost, all relationship with God impossible on that footing, for the ark was lost; there was no longer a mercy-seat, no longer a throne of God among the people. Ichabod was written on Israel.

Therefore in speaking of holiness he says, God is active in love towards you, even in your very sufferings. It is He who has not only given free access to Himself, by the blood and by the presence of Christ in heaven for us, but who is continually occupied with all the details of your life; whose hand is in all your trials, who thinks unceasingly about you, in order to make you partakers of His holiness. This is not to require holiness on our part — necessary as it must ever be — it is in order to make us partakers of His own holiness. What immense and perfect grace! What a means! It is the means by which to enjoy God Himself perfectly.

Verse 11. God does not expect us to find these exercises of soul pleasant at the moment (they would not produce their effect if they were so): but

afterwards, the will being broken they produce the peaceable fruits of righteousness. The pride of man is brought down when he is obliged to submit to that which is contrary to his will. God also takes a larger (ever precious) place in his thoughts and in his life.

Verse 12. On the principle then of grace, the Hebrews are exhorted to encourage themselves in the path of faith, and to watch against the buddings of sin among them, whether in yielding to the desires of the flesh, or in giving up christian privileges for something of the world. They were to walk so courageously that their evident joy and blessing (which is always a distinct testimony and one that triumphs over the enemy) should make the weak feel that it was their own assured portion also; and thus strength and healing would be administered to them instead of discouragement. The path of godliness as to circumstances was to be made easy, a beaten path to weak and lame souls; and they would feel more than stronger souls the comfort and value of such a path.

Grace, we have already said, is the motive given for this walk; but grace is here presented in a form that requires to be considered a little in detail.

We are not come, it says, to Mount Sinai. There the terrors of the majesty of God kept man at a distance. No one was to approach Him. Even Moses feared and trembled at the presence of Jehovah. This is not where the Christian is brought. But, in contrast with such relationships as these with God, the whole millennial state in all its parts is developed; according however to the way in which these different parts are now known as things hoped for. We belong to it all; but evidently these things are not yet established. Let us name them: Sion; the heavenly Jerusalem; the angels and general assembly; the church of the firstborn, whose names are inscribed in heaven; God the Judge of all; the spirits of the just made perfect; Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant; and finally, the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than that of Abel.

Sion we have spoken of as a principle. It is the intervention of sovereign grace (in the king) after the ruin, and in the midst of the ruin, of Israel, re-establishing the people according to the counsels of God in glory, and their relationships with God Himself. It is the rest of God on the earth, the seat of the Messiah's royal power. But, as we know, the extent of the earth is far from being the limits of the Lord's inheritance. Sion on earth is

Jehovah's rest; it is not the city of the living God — the heavenly Jerusalem is that, the heavenly capital, so to speak, of His kingdom, the city that has foundations, whose founder and builder is God Himself.

Having named Sion below, the author turns naturally to Jerusalem above, but this carries him into heaven, and he finds himself with all the people of God, in the midst of a multitude of angels, the great universal assembly\* of the invisible world. There is however one peculiar object on which his eye rests in this marvelous and heavenly scene. It is the assembly of the firstborn whose names are inscribed in heaven. They were not born there, not indigenous like the angels, whom God preserved from falling. They are the objects of the counsels of God. It is not merely that they reach heaven: they are the glorious heirs and firstborn of God, according to His eternal counsels, in accordance with which they are registered in heaven. The assembly composed of the objects of grace, now called in Christ, belongs to heaven by grace. They are not the objects of the promises, who, not having received the fulfillment of the promises on earth, do not fail to enjoy them in heaven. They have the anticipation of no other country or citizenship than heaven. The promises were not addressed to them. They have no place on earth. Heaven is prepared for them by God Himself. Their names are inscribed there by Him. It is the highest place in heaven above the dealings of God in government, promise, and law on the earth. This leads the picture of glory on to God Himself. But (having reached the highest point, that which is most excellent in grace) He is seen under another character, namely, as the Judge of all, as looking down from on high to judge all that is below. This introduces another class of these blessed inhabitants of the heavenly glory: those whom the righteous Judge owned as His before the heavenly assembly was revealed, the spirits of the just arrived at perfection. They had finished their course, they had overcome in conflict, they were waiting only for glory. They had been connected with the dealings of God on the earth, but — faithful before the time for its blessing was come — they had their rest and their portion in heaven.

[\* The word here translated "assembly" was that of all the states of Greece; that of the "firstborn" is the word for the assembly of citizens of any particular state.]

It was the purpose of God nevertheless to bless the earth. He could not do so according to man's responsibility: His people even were but as grass. He would therefore establish a new covenant with Israel, a covenant of pardon, and according to which He would write the law in the hearts of His people. The Mediator of this covenant had already appeared and had done all that was required for its establishment. The saints among the Hebrews were come to the Mediator of the new covenant: blessing was thus prepared for the earth and secured to it.

Finally, the blood of Christ had been shed on earth, as that of Abel by Cain; but, instead of crying from the earth for vengeance, so that Cain became a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth (a striking type of the Jew, guilty of the death of Christ), it is grace that speaks; and the shed blood cries to obtain pardon and peace for those who shed it.

It will be observed that, although speaking of the different parts of millennial blessing, with its foundations, all is given according to the present condition of things, before the coming of that time of blessing from God. We are in it as to our relationships; but the spirits of the just men of the Old Testament only are here spoken of, and only the Mediator of this new covenant: the covenant itself is not established. The blood cries, but the answer in earthly blessing has not yet come. This is easily understood. It is exactly according to the existing state of things, and even throws considerable light on the position of the Hebrew Christians and on the doctrine of the epistle. The important thing for them was, that they should not turn away from Him who spoke from heaven. It was with Him they had to do. We have seen them connected with all that went before, with the Lord's testimony on earth; but in fact they had to do at that time with the Lord Himself as speaking from heaven. His voice then shook the earth; but now, speaking with the authority of grace and from heaven, He announced the dissolution of everything which the flesh could lean upon, or on which the creature could rest its hopes.

All that could be shaken should be dissolved. How much more fatal to turn away from Him that speaketh now, than from the commandments even of Sinai! This shaking of all things (whether here or in the analogous passage in 2 Peter) evidently goes beyond Judaism, but has a peculiar application to it. Judaism was the system and the frame of the relationships of God

with men on earth according to the principle of responsibility on their part. All this was of the first creation, but its springs were poisoned; heaven, the seat of the enemy's power, perverted and corrupted; the heart of man on earth was corrupt and rebellious. God will shake and change all things. The result will be a new creation in which righteousness shall dwell.

Meanwhile the first fruits of this new creation were being formed; and in Christianity God was forming the heavenly part of the kingdom that cannot be moved; and Judaism — the center of the earthly system and of human responsibility — was passing away. The apostle therefore announces the shaking of all things — that everything which exists as the present creation shall be set aside. With regard to the present fact he says only, “we receive a kingdom that cannot be moved”; and calls us to serve God with true piety, because our God is a consuming fire; not — as people say — God out of Christ, but our God. This is His character in holy majesty and in righteous judgment of evil.

**CHAPTER 13.** In this next chapter there is more than one truth important to notice. The exhortations are as simple as they are weighty, and require but few remarks. They rest in the sphere in which the whole of the epistle does: what relates to the Christian's path as walking here, not what flows from union with Christ in heavenly places. Brotherly love, hospitality, care for those in bonds, the strict maintenance of the marriage tie and personal purity, the avoiding of covetousness: such are the subjects of exhortation, all important and connected with the gracious walk of a Christian, but not drawn from the higher and more heavenly sources and principles of the christian life as we see in Ephesians and Colossians. Nor, even though there be more analogy — for the epistle to the Romans rests in general in life in Christ in this world, presenting Christ's resurrection, without going on to His ascension\* are the exhortations such as in this latter epistle. Those which follow connect themselves with the circumstances in which the Hebrews found themselves, and rest on the approaching abolition and judgment of Judaism, from which they had now definitely to separate themselves.

[\* It is only spoken of in chapter 8:34, and an allusion in chapter 10:6.]

In exhorting them (v. 7) to remember those who have guided the flock, he speaks of those already departed in contrast with those still living (v. 17).

The issue of their faith might well encourage others to follow their steps, to walk by those principles of faith which had led them to so noble a result.

Moreover Christ never changed; He was the same yesterday, today, and for ever. Let them abide in the simplicity and integrity of faith. Nothing is a plainer proof that the heart is not practically in possessing of that which gives rest in Christ, that it does not realise what Christ is, than the restless search after something new — "divers and strange doctrines." To grow in the knowledge of Christ is our life and our privilege. The search after novelties which are foreign to Him, is a proof of not being satisfied with Him. But He who is not satisfied with Jesus does not know Him, or, at least, has forgotten Him. It is impossible to enjoy Him, and not to feel that He is everything, that is to say, that He satisfies us, and that by the nature of what He is, He shuts out everything else.

Now with regard to Judaism, in which the Hebrews were naturally inclined to seek satisfaction for the flesh, the apostle goes farther. They were no longer Jews in the possession of the true worship of God, a privileged worship in which others had no right to participate. The altar of God belonged now to the Christians. Christians only had a right to it. An earthly worship, in which there was no entering within the veil, into God's own presence in the sanctuary, could no longer subsist — a worship that had its worldly glory, that belonged to the elements of this world and had its place there. Now, it is either heaven, or the cross and shame. The great sacrifice for sin has been offered; but by its efficacy, it brings us into the sanctuary, into heaven itself, where the blood has been carried in; and on the other hand it takes us outside the camp, a religious people connected with the world down here, into shame and rejection on earth. This is the portion of Christ. In heaven He is accepted, He has gone in with His own blood — on earth cast out and despised.

A worldly religion, which forms a system in which the world can walk, and in which the religious element is adapted to man on the earth, is the denial of Christianity.

Here we have no continuing city, we seek the one which is to come. By Christ we offer our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. By sharing also

our goods with others, by doing good in every way, we offer sacrifices with which God is well pleased (v. 16).

He then exhorts them to obey those who, as responsible to God, watch over souls, and who go before the saints in order to lead them on. It is a proof of that humble spirit of grace which seeks only to please the Lord.

The sense of this responsibility makes Paul ask the saints to pray for him, but with the declaration that he had assuredly a good conscience. We serve God, we act for Him, when He is not obliged to be acting on us. That is to say, the Spirit of God acts by our means when He has not to occupy us with ourselves. When the latter is the case, one could not ask for the prayers of saints as a laborer. While the Spirit is exercising us in our conscience, we cannot call ourselves laborers of God. When the conscience is good, we can ask unreservedly for the prayers of the saints. The apostle so much the more asked for them because he hoped thus the sooner to see them again.

Finally, he invokes blessing upon them, giving God the title he so often ascribes to Him — "the God of peace." In the midst of exercise of heart with regard to the Hebrews, of arguments to preserve their love from growing cold, in the midst of the moral unsteadiness that enfeebled the walk of these Christians, and their trials in the breaking down of what they considered stable and holy, this title has a peculiarly precious character.

The Spirit sets them also in the presence of a risen Christ, of a God who had founded and secured peace by the death of Christ, and had given a proof of it in His resurrection. He had brought Christ again from the dead according to the power of the blood of the everlasting\* covenant. On this blood the believing people might build a hope that nothing could shake. For it was not, as at Sinai, promises founded on the condition of the people's obedience, but on the ransom which had been paid, and the perfect expiation of their disobedience. The blessing was therefore unchangeable, the covenant (as the inheritance and the redemption) was everlasting. He prays that the God who had wrought it, would work in them to grant them full power and energy for the accomplishment of His will, working Himself in them that which was well-pleasing in His sight.



[\* The word “everlasting” is specific, in the epistle to the Hebrews, in contrast with a system which was passing away. It speaks of eternal redemption, eternal inheritance, the eternal Spirit even.]

He urges them to give heed to exhortation; he had only sent them a few words.

He who wrote the letter desires they should know that Timothy had been set at liberty; he himself was so already; he was in Italy; circumstances which tend to confirm the idea that it was Paul who wrote this letter a very interesting point, although in nowise affecting its authority.

It is the Spirit of God who everywhere gives His own authority to the word.

## JAMES

The epistle of James is not addressed to the assembly, and does not take the ground of apostolic authority over the persons to whom it is sent. It is a practical exhortation which still recognises the twelve tribes and the connection of the christian Jews with them, as Jonah addressed the Gentiles, although the Jewish people had their place before God. Thus the Spirit of God still acknowledges here the relationship with Israel, as in the other case the relationship with Gentiles, and the rights of God which are unchangeable, whatever may be the special privileges granted to the assembly or to Israel respectively. We know that historically the christian Jews remained Jews to the end of the New Testament history, and were even zealous for the law — to us a strange thing, but which God endured for a time.

The doctrine of Christianity is not the subject of this epistle. It gives God His place in the conscience, and with regard to all that surrounds us. It thus girds up the lions of the Christian, presenting also the near coming of the Lord and His present discipline — a discipline with respect to which the assembly of God ought to possess intelligence, and activity founded thereon. The world also, and all that makes an appearance in it, is judged from God's point of view.

A few remarks on the position of Christians (that is, on the way in which this position is viewed with respect to Israel) will help us to understand this portion of the Word.

Israel is still regarded as the people of God. To the faith of James the nation has still the relationship which God had given it towards Himself. The Christians in it are addressed as still forming part of a people whose links with God were not yet judicially broken; but it was only the Christians among them who possessed the faith which the Spirit gave in the true Messiah. These only among the people, with the writer, acknowledged Jesus as the Lord of glory. With the exception of verses 14, 15, in chapter 5, this epistle contains no exhortation which, in its spiritual height, goes beyond that which might be addressed to a godly Jew. It

supposes indeed that the persons to whom it speaks have faith in the Lord Jesus; but it does not call them to that which is exclusively proper to Christianity and depends on its privileges. The exhortations flow from that higher source and breathe the more heavenly atmosphere, but the effect they aim at producing consists in real proofs of religion here below; they are such as might be heard in the professing church — a vast body like Israel, in the midst of which some Christians existed.

The epistle is not founded on christian relationships here below. It acknowledges them; but only as one fact in the midst of others, which have rights over the conscience of the writer. It supposes those whom it addresses to be in a relationship with God, which is known, unquestioned, and of ancient date; in the midst of which Christianity has been introduced.

It is important to notice the moral measure of the life which this epistle presents. As soon as we apprehend the position in which it views believers, the discernment of the truth on this point is not difficult. It is the same as that which Christ presented when walking in the midst of Israel and setting before His disciples the light, and the relationships with God, which resulted to them from His presence. Now indeed He was absent; but that light and those relationships are retained as the measure of responsibility. And this the Lord's return would vindicate by judgment on those who refused to accept and walk in it. Until that day the faithful were to be patient in the midst of the oppression they were suffering from on the part of the Jews, who still blasphemed the holy name by which they were called.

It is the converse of the epistle to the Hebrews with regard to their relationship with the Jewish nation; not morally, but because of the nearness of the judgment when the epistle to the Hebrews was written.

The fundamental principles of the position that we have been speaking of are as follows: the law in its spirituality and perfection, as stated and summed up by Christ; a life imparted, which has the moral principles of the law, itself a divine life; the revelation of the Father's name. All this was true when the Lord was on the earth, and was the ground on which (however poorly they understood it) He then placed His disciples. He told them that they were to be witnesses of it, as of all He had said, after His death, distinguishing this testimony from that of the Holy Ghost.

It is this which James teaches here, with the addition of that which the Lord had also said — that He would come again. It is the doctrine of Christ with regard to walk in the midst of Israel, according to the light and the truths which He had introduced; and — seeing that He was still absent — an exhortation to perseverance and patience in that walk, waiting for the moment when, by judgment on those who oppressed them, He would vindicate the principles on which they walked.

Although the judgment executed on Jerusalem changed the position of the remnant of Israel in this respect, yet the life of Christ remains ever our model: and we have to wait with patience until the Lord come.

We have not in this epistle the association of the Christian with Christ exalted on high, nor consequently the thought of going to meet Him in the air, as Paul taught. But that which it contains ever remains true: and he who says that he abides in Him (Christ) ought also to walk even as He walked.

The judgment that was coming makes us understand the way in which James speaks of the world, of the rich who rejoice in their portion in the world, and the position of the believing remnant oppressed and suffering in the midst of the unbelieving nation; why he begins with the subject of the tribulations and so often recurs to it: why also he insists on practical evidences of faith. He still sees all Israel together; but some had received faith in the Lord of glory, and these were tempted to value the rich and the great in Israel. All being still Jews, we can easily understand that, while some truly believed and confessed their belief that Jesus was the Christ, yet, as these Christians followed the Jewish ordinances, mere professors might do as much without the least vital change being proved by their works. It is evident that a faith like this has no value whatever. It is precisely the faith of those who clamor for works in the present day — a mere dead profession of the truth of Christianity. To be begotten by the word of truth is as foreign and strange to them as to the Jews of whom James is speaking.

Believers being thus placed in the midst of Israel with some who merely professed faith, we can readily understand the apostle's address to the mass as those who might share in the privileges that existed in their midst; his address to Christians as having a special place of their own; and his

warning to those who called themselves believers in Christ. Most easy and perfectly clear is the practical application to all times, and in particular when a mass of persons assume a right by inheritance to the privileges of the people of God. Besides this, the epistle has peculiar force for the individual conscience; it judges the position one is in, and the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The epistle then begins with an exhortation to rejoice in trial, as a means of producing patience. This subject in the main continues to the end of verse 20, where the idea turns towards the necessity of curbing everything that opposes itself to patience and towards the true character of one who stands in the presence of God. This address, as a whole, ends with the chapter. The connection of the reasoning is not always easy to find; the key to it is the moral condition with which the apostle's mind is occupied. I will endeavor to make the connection more apparent.

The subject in the main is, that we ought to walk before God to show the reality of our profession in contrast with union with the world — practical religion. Patience then must have its perfect work; thus self-will is subdued, and the whole of God's will is accepted; consequently nothing is wanting to the practical life of the soul. The believer may suffer; but he patiently waits on the Lord. This Christ did; it was His perfection. He waited for the will of God, and never did His own will thus obedience was perfect, man thoroughly tested. But in fact we often lack wisdom to know what we ought to do. Here it says the resource is evident: we are to ask wisdom from God. He gives to all liberally; only we must count upon His faithfulness and upon an answer to our prayers. Otherwise the heart is double; there is dependence elsewhere than on God; our desires have another object. If we only seek that which God wills and that which God does, we depend securely on Him to accomplish it; and as to the circumstances of this world, which might make one believe that it was useless to depend on God, they vanish away as the flower of the field. We ought to have the consciousness that our place according to God is not that which is of this world. He who is in a low station should rejoice that Christianity exalts him; the rich, that it humbles him. It is not in riches that we are to rejoice (they pass away), but in the exercises of heart of which the apostle had been speaking; for after having been tried we shall receive the crown of life.

The life of one who is thus tried, and in whom this life develops itself in obedience to the entire will of God, is well worth that of a man who indulges all the desires of his heart in luxury.

Now with regard to temptations of this last character, into which the lusts of the heart cause men to fall, it must not be said that these lusts come from God: the heart of man is their source — its lusts which lead through sin to death. Let no one deceive himself on this point. That which inwardly tempts the heart comes from oneself. All good and perfect gifts come from God, and He never changes, He does nothing but good. Accordingly He has given us a new nature, the fruit of His own will working in us by the word of truth, in order that we should be as it were first-fruits of His creatures. The Father of lights, that which is darkness does not come from Him.

By the word of truth He has begotten us to be the first and most excellent witnesses of that power of good which will shine forth hereafter in the new creation, of which we are the firstfruits. This is the opposite of being the source of corrupt desires. The word of truth is the good seed of life; self-will is the cradle of our lusts — its energy can never produce the fruits of divine nature; nor the wrath of man the righteousness of God. Therefore we are called to be docile, to be ready to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, to lay aside all filthiness of the flesh, all energy of iniquity, and to receive the word with meekness — a word which, while it is the word of God, identifies itself with the new nature that is in us (it is planted in us) while forming and developing it according to its own perfection; because this nature itself has its origin from God through the word.

It is not as a law which is outside us, and which, being opposed to our sinful nature, condemns us. This word saves the soul; it is living and quickening, and it works livingly in a nature that flows from it, and which it forms and enlightens.

But it is necessary to be doers of the word, not merely to hear it with the ear, but that it should produce the practical fruits which are the proof that it works really and vitally in the heart. Otherwise the word is only as a mirror in which we may perhaps see ourselves for a moment, and then forget what we have seen. He who looks into the perfect law, which is that

of liberty, and continues in it, doing the work which it presents, shall be blessed in the real and obedient activity developed in him.

This law is perfect; for the word of God, all that the Spirit of God has expressed, is the expression of the nature and the character of God, of that which He is and of that which He wills: for, when fully revealed (and till then man cannot fully know Him), He wills that which He is, and this necessarily.

This law is the law of liberty, because the same word which reveals what God is and what He wills has made us partakers by grace of the divine nature; so that not to walk according to that word would be not to walk according to our own new nature. Now to walk according to our own new nature, and that the nature of God, and guided by His word, is true liberty.

The law given on Sinai was the expression in man, written not on the heart but outside man, of what man's conduct and heart ought to be according to the will of God. It represses and condemns all the motions of the natural man, and cannot allow him to have a will, for he ought to do the will of God. But he has another will, and therefore the law is bondage to him, a law of condemnation and death. Now, God having begotten us by the word of truth, the nature that we have, as thus born of God, possesses tastes and desires according to that word; it is of that very word. The word in its own perfection develops this nature, forms it, enlightens it, as we have said; but the nature itself has its liberty in following it. Thus it was with Christ; if His liberty could have been taken away (which spiritually was impossible), it would have been by preventing Him from doing the will of God the Father.

It is the same with the new man in us (which is Christ as life in us) which is created in us according to God in righteousness and true holiness, produced in us by the word, which is the perfect revelation of God — of the whole divine nature in man of which Christ, the living Word, the image of the invisible God, is the manifestation and the pattern. The liberty of the new man is liberty to do the will of God, to imitate God in character, as being His dear child, according as that character was presented in Christ. The law of liberty is this character, as it is revealed in the word, in which the new nature finds its joy and satisfaction; even as it drew its existence

from the word which reveals Him, and from the God who is therein revealed.

Such is the “law of liberty” — the character of God Himself in us formed by the operation of a nature, begotten through the word which reveals Him, moulding itself upon the word.

The first and most sifting index of the inner man is the tongue. A man who appears to be in relationship with God and to honor Him, yet who cannot bridle his tongue, deceives himself, and his religion is vain.

Pure religion before God and the Father is to care for those who, reached in the tenderest relationships by the wages of sin, are deprived of their natural supports; and to keep oneself untainted by the world. Instead of striving to exalt oneself and gain reputation in a world of vanity, afar from God, our activities turn, as God does, to the sorrowful, who in their affliction, need succor; and we keep ourselves from a world in which everything is defiling, and contrary to the new nature which is our life, and to the character of God as we know it by the word.

**CHAPTER 2.** The apostle now enters on the subject of those who professed to believe that Jesus was Christ the Lord. Before, in chapter 1, he had spoken of the new nature in connection with God: here the profession of faith in Christ is brought to the same touchstone — the reality of the fruits produced by it in contrast with this world. All these principles — the value of the name of Jesus, the essence of the law as Christ presented it, and the law of liberty — are brought forward to test the reality of their professed faith, or to convince the professor that he did not possess it. Two things are reprobated: having respect to the outward appearance of persons; and the absence of good works as a proof of the sincerity of the profession.

First, then, he blames respect for outward appearance of persons. They profess faith in the Lord Jesus, and yet hold with the spirit of the world! He replies that God has chosen the poor, making them rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom. These professors had despised them; these rich men blasphemed the name of Christ and persecuted Christians.

In the second place he appeals to the practical summary of the law, of which Jesus had spoken — the royal law. They broke the law itself in



favoring the rich. Now the law did not allow of any infraction whatsoever of its commands, because the authority of the legislator was concerned. In despising the poor, they were assuredly not loving their neighbor as themselves.

In the third place they ought to walk as those whose responsibility was measured by the law of liberty, in which — possessing a nature which tasted and loved that which was of God — they were set free from all that was contrary to Him; so that they could not excuse themselves if they admitted principles which were not those of God Himself. This introduction of the divine nature leads the apostle on to speak of the mercy by which God glorifies Himself. The man who shows no mercy will find himself the object of the judgment which he has loved.

The second part of the chapter is connected with this; for he begins his discourse on works, as proofs of faith, by speaking of this mercy which answers to the nature and character of God, of which, as born of Him, the true Christian is made a partaker. The profession of having faith without this life — the existence of which is proved by works — can profit no one. This is plain enough. I say the profession of having faith, because the epistle says it: “If a man say he hath faith.” This is the key to this part of the epistle. He says it: where is the proof of it? Works are the proof; and it is in this way that the apostle uses them. A man says he hath faith. It is not a thing that we can see. I say therefore with reason, “Show it me.” This is the evidence of faith which is required for man — it is only by its fruits that we make it evident to men; for the faith itself cannot be seen. But if I produce these fruits, then assuredly I have the root, without which there could not be the fruits. Thus faith does not show itself to others, nor can I recognise it, without works; but works, the fruit of faith, prove the existence of faith.

That which follows shows that he is speaking of the profession of a doctrine, true perhaps in itself — of certain truths being confessed; for it is a real faith looked at — certainty of knowledge and conviction — which devils have of the unity of the Godhead. They do not doubt it; but there is no link at all between their heart and God by means of a new nature — far indeed from it.

But the apostle confirms this, by the case of men in whom the opposition to the divine nature is not so apparent. Faith, the recognition of the truth with respect to Christ, is dead without works; that is, such a faith as produces none is dead.

We see (v. 16) that the faith of which the apostle speaks is a profession devoid of reality; verse 19 shows that it may be an unfeigned certainty that the thing is true: but the life begotten by the word, so that a relationship is formed between the soul and God, is entirely wanting. Because this takes place through the word, it is faith; being begotten of God we have a new life. This life acts, that is to say, faith acts, according to the relationship with God, by works which flow naturally from it, and which bear testimony to the faith that produced them.

From verse 20 to the end he presents a fresh proof of his thesis, founded on the last principle that I have mentioned. Now these proofs have nothing at all to do with the fruits of a kindly nature (for there are such), appertaining to us as creatures, but not to that life which has for its source the word of God, by which He begets us. The fruits of which the apostle speaks, bear testimony by their very character to the faith that produced them. Abraham offered up his son; Rahab received the messengers of Israel, associating herself with the people of God when everything was against them, and separating herself from her own people by faith. All sacrificed for God, all given up for His people before they had gained one victory, and while the world was in full power, such were the fruits of faith. One referred to God; and believed Him in the most absolute way, against all that is in nature or on which nature can count; the other owned God's people, when all was against them; but neither was the fruit of an amiable nature or natural good, such as men call good works. One was a father going to put his son to death, the other a bad woman betraying her country. Certainly the scripture was fulfilled which said that Abraham believed God. How could he have acted as he did, if he had not believed Him? Works put a seal on his faith: and faith without works is but like the body without the soul, an outward form devoid of the life that animates it. Faith acts in the works (without it the works are a nullity, they are not those of the new life), and the works complete the faith which acts in them; for in spite of trial, and in the trial, faith is in activity. Works of law have no part in it. The outward law which exacts, is not a life which

produces (apart from this divine nature) these holy and loving dispositions which, having God and His people for their object, value nothing else.

James, remark, never says that works justify us before God; for God can see the faith without its works. He knows that life is there. It is in exercise with regard to Him, towards Him, by trust in His word, in Himself, by receiving His testimony in spite of everything within and without. This God sees and knows. But when our fellow-creatures are in question, when it must be said “show me,” then faith, life, shows itself in works.

In **CHAPTER 3** the apostle recurs to the tongue, the most ready index to the heart, the proof whether the new man is in action, whether nature and self-will are under restraint. But there is hardly anything here which needs remark, although much that demands the hearing ear. Where there is the divine life, knowledge does not display itself in mere words, but in the walk and by works in which the meekness of true wisdom will be seen. Bitterness and contention are not the fruits of a wisdom that comes from above, but are earthly, of the nature of a man, and of the enemy.

The wisdom that comes from above, having its place in the life, in the heart, has three characteristics. First of all, the character of purity, for the heart is in communion with God — has intercourse with Him; therefore, there must needs be this purity. Next, it is peaceable, gentle, ready to yield to the will of another. Then, full of good works, acting by a principle which, as its origin and motives are from above, does good without partiality; that is to say, its action is not guided by the circumstances which influence the flesh and the passions of men. For the same reason it is sincere and unfeigned. Purity, absence of will and self, activity in good, such are the characteristics of heavenly wisdom.

These directions to bridle the tongue, as the first movement and expression of the will of the natural man, extend to believers. There are not to be (as to the inward disposition of the man) many teachers. We all fail; and to teach others and fail ourselves only increases our condemnation. For vanity can easily be fed in teaching others; and that is a very different thing from having the life quickened by the power of truth. The Holy Ghost bestows His gifts as He pleases. The apostle speaks here of the propensity in any one to teach, not of the gift he may have received for teaching.

In all that follows (chap. 4) we have still the judgment of unbridled nature, of will in its different forms: contentions that arise from the lusts of the natural heart; requests made to God proceeding from the same source; the desires of the flesh and of the mind developing themselves and finding their sphere in the friendship of the world, which is thus enmity against God. The nature of man covets enviously, is full of envy with regard to others. But God gives more grace: there is counteracting power, if one is content to be little and humble, to be as nothing in the world. The grace and favor of God are with such a one; for He resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. Upon this, the apostle unfolds the action of a soul directed by the Spirit of God, in the midst of the unbelieving and selfish multitude with whom it was associated (v. 6-10). For he still supposes the believers whom he addressed to be in connection with the law. If they spoke evil of their brother, to whom the law gave a place before God, they spoke evil of the law,\* according to which his value was so great. Judgment belonged to God, who had given the law, and who would vindicate His own authority as well as grant deliverance and salvation.

[\* Compare 1 Thessalonians 4:8, where the Spirit takes the place of the law here.]

Verses 13-16. The same self-will and forgetfulness of God are blamed, the false confidence that flows from reckoning upon being able to do as one pleases — the absence of dependence on God. Verse 17 is a general conclusion, founded on the principle already suggested (chap. 3:1), and on that which is said with regard to faith. The knowledge of good, without its practice, causes even the absence of the work which one could have performed to be a positive sin. The action of the new man is absent, that of the old man is present; for the good is before our eyes — we know what we ought to do, and do not choose to do it; there is no inclination to do it — we will not do it.

**CHAPTER 5.** The two classes in Israel are distinctly marked here in contrast with one another, with the addition of the walk which the Christian ought to pursue when chastised by the Lord.

The apostle gives the coming of the Lord as the term of their condition, both to the unbelieving rich oppressors in Israel, and to the poor believing remnant. The rich have heaped up treasures for the last days; the

oppressed poor are to be patient until the Lord Himself shall come to deliver them. Moreover, he says, deliverance would not be delayed. The husbandman waits for the rain and the time of harvest; the Christian for his Master's coming. This patience characterises, as we have seen, the walk of faith. It had been witnessed in the prophets; and in the case of others we count them happy which endure afflictions for the Lord's sake. Job shows us the ways of the Lord: he needed to have patience, but the end of the Lord was blessing and tender mercy towards him.

This expectation of the coming of the Lord was a solemn warning, and at the same time the strongest encouragement, but one which maintained the true character of the Christian's practical life. It showed also what the selfishness of man's will would end in, and it restrained all action of that will in believers. The feelings of brethren towards each other were placed under the safeguard of this same truth. They were not to have a spirit of discontent, or to murmur against others who were perhaps more favored in their outward circumstances: "the judge stood before the door."

Oaths displayed still more the forgetfulness of God, and the actings consequently of the self-will of nature. "Yea," ought to be yea, and "Nay," nay. The actings of the divine nature in the consciousness of the presence of God, and the repression of all human will and of sinful nature, is what the writer of this epistle desires.

Now there were resources in Christianity both for joy and sorrow. If any were afflicted, let them pray (God was ready to hear); if happy, let them sing; if sick, send for the elders of the assembly, who would pray for the sufferer and anoint him, and the chastisement would be removed, and the sins for which, according to God's government, he was thus chastised, would be forgiven as regards that government; for it is that only which is here spoken of.

The imputation of sin for condemnation has no place here. The efficacy of the prayer of faith is set before us; but it is in connection with the maintenance of sincerity of heart. The government of God is exercised with regard to His people. He chastises them by sickness; and it is important that truth in the inner man should be maintained. Men hide their faults; they desire to walk as if all were going on well; but God judges His people. He tries the heart and the reins. They are held in bonds of affliction. God

shows them their faults, or their unbroken self-will. Man “is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain,” Job 33:19. And now the church of God intervenes in charity, and according to its own order, by means of the elders; the sick man commits himself to God, confessing his state of need; the charity of the church acts and brings him who is chastised, according to this relationship, before God — for that is where the church is. Faith pleads this relationship of grace; the sick man is healed. If sins — and not merely the need of discipline — were the cause of his chastisement, those sins will not hinder his being healed, they shall be forgiven him.

The apostle then presents the principle in general as the course for all, namely, to open their hearts to each other, in order to maintain truth in the inner man as to oneself; and to pray for each other in order that charity should be in full exercise with regard to the faults of others; grace and truth being thus spiritually formed in the church, and a perfect union of heart among Christians, so that even their faults are an occasion for the exercise of charity (as in God towards us), and entire confidence in each other, according to that charity, such as is felt towards a restoring and pardoning God. What a beautiful picture is presented of divine principles animating men and causing them to act according to the nature of God Himself, and the influence of His love upon the heart.

We may remark, that it is not confession to the elders that is spoken of. That would have been confidence in men — official confidence. God desires the operation of divine charity in all. Confession to one another shows the condition of the church, and God would have the church to be in such a state, that love should so reign in it, that they should be so near to God, as to be able to treat the transgressor according to the grace they know in Him: and that this love should be so realised, that perfect inward sincerity should be produced by the confidence and operation of grace. Official confession destroys all this — is contrary to it. How divine the wisdom which omitted confession when speaking of the elders, but which commands it as the living and voluntary impression of the heart!

This leads us also to the value of the energetic prayers of the righteous man. It is his nearness to God, the sense that he has consequently of that which God is, which (through grace and the operation of the Spirit) gives

him this power. God takes account of men, and that according to the infinitude of His love. He takes account of the trust in Himself, the faith in His word, shown by one who thinks and acts according to a just appreciation of what He is. That is always faith, which makes sensible to us that which we do not see — God Himself, who acts in accordance with the revelation that He has given of Himself. Now the man who in the practical sense is righteous through grace, is near to God; as being righteous, he has not to do with God for himself with regard to sin, which would keep his heart at a distance; his heart is thus free to draw nigh to God, according to His holy nature on behalf of others; and, moved by the divine nature, which animates him and which enables him to appreciate God, he seeks, according to the activity of that nature, that his prayers may prevail with God, whether for the good of others or for the glory of God Himself in his service. And God answers, according to that same nature, by blessing this trust and responding to it, in order to manifest what He is for faith, to encourage it by sanctioning its activity, putting His seal on the man who walks by faith.\*

[\* It is well to remember that this is carried out in respect of the governing ways of God, and thus under the title of Lord — a place which Christ specially holds, though here the term is used generally. Compare verse 11, and the general Jewish reference of the passage. To us we have one God the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ. He is become Lord and Christ, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.]

The Spirit of God acts, we know, in all this; but the apostle does not here speak of Him, being occupied with the practical effect, and presenting the man as he is seen, acting under the influence of this nature in its positive energy with regard to God, and near to Him, so that it acts in all its intensity, moved by the power of that nearness. But if we consider the action of the Spirit, these thoughts are confirmed. The righteous man does not grieve the Holy Ghost, and the Spirit works in him according to His own power, not having to set his conscience right with God, but acting in the man according to the power of his communion.

Finally, we have the assurance that the ardent and energetic prayer of the righteous man has great efficacy: it is the prayer of faith, which knows God and counts upon Him and draws near Him.

The case of Elijah is interesting, as showing us (and there are other examples of the same kind) how the Holy Ghost acts inwardly in a man where we see the outward manifestation of power. In the history we have Elijah's declaration: "Jehovah liveth, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." This is the authority, the power, exercised in the name of Jehovah. In our epistle the secret operation, that which passes between the soul and God, is set forth. He prayed, and God heard him. We have the same testimony on the part of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus. Only that in the latter case we have the two together, except that the prayer itself is not given — unless in the unutterable groan of Christ's spirit.

Comparing Galatians 2 with the history of Acts 15, we find a revelation from God which determined Paul's conduct, whatever outward motives there may have been which were known to all. By such cases as those which the apostle proposes to the church, and those of Elijah and the Lord Jesus, a God, living, acting, and interesting Himself in all that happens among His people, is revealed to us.

There is also the activity of love towards those who err. If any one departs from the truth, and they bring him back by grace, let it be known that to bring back a sinner from the error of his ways is the exercise — simple as our action in it may be — of the power that delivers a soul from death; accordingly all those sins which spread themselves in their odious nature before the eyes of God, and offended His glory and His heart by their presence in His universe, are covered. The soul being brought to God by grace, all its sins are pardoned, appear no more, are blotted out from before the face of God. The apostle (as throughout) does not speak of the power that acts in this work of love, but of the fact. He applies it to cases that had happened among them; but he establishes a universal principle with regard to the activity of grace in the heart that is animated by it. The erring soul is saved; the sin is put away from before God.

Charity in the assembly suppresses, so to speak, the sins which otherwise would destroy union and overcome that charity in the assembly, and appear in all their deformity and all their malignancy before God. Whereas, being met by love in the assembly, they go no farther, are, as it were (as regards the state of things before God in this world), dissolved and put



away by the charity which they could not vanquish. The sin is vanquished by the love which dealt with it, disappears? is swallowed up by it. Thus love covers a multitude of sins. Here it is its action in the conversion of a sinner.

# 1 PETER

The first epistle of Peter is addressed to believers among the dispersed of Israel found in those provinces of Asia Minor which are named in the first verse; the second epistle declares itself to be a second addressed to the same persons: so that the one and the other were destined for the Jews of Asia Minor (that is, to those among them who had the same precious faith as the apostle).

The first epistle is founded on the doctrine of the heavenly calling (I do not say of the assembly on earth,\* which is not brought before us here) in contrast with the portion of the Jews on the earth. It presents Christians, and in particular Christians among the Jews, as pilgrims and strangers on earth. The conduct suited to such is more largely developed than the doctrine. The Lord Jesus, who was Himself a pilgrim and a stranger here, is presented as a pattern in more than one aspect. Both epistles pursue the righteous government of God from the beginning to the consummation of all things, in which the elements melt with fervent heat, and there are new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. The first gives the government of God in favor of believers, the second in the judgment of the wicked.

[\* I add “on earth” here, because the assembly, as built by Jesus Himself and not yet finished, is spoken of in chapter 2, where the living stones come to Christ.]

Nevertheless, in presenting the heavenly calling, the apostle necessarily presents salvation — the deliverance of the soul in contrast with the temporal deliverance of the Jews.

The following is the description which the Spirit gives of these believers. They are elect, and that according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Israel was a nation elected on the earth by Jehovah. Here, it is those who were foreknown of the Father. The means by which their election is carried out is sanctification of the Holy Ghost. They are really set apart by the power of the Spirit. Israel was set apart by ordinances; but these are sanctified unto the obedience of Jesus Christ and for the sprinkling of His

blood, that is to say, on the one hand to obey as He obeyed, and on the other to be sprinkled with His blood and thus to be perfectly clear before God. Israel had been set apart for the obedience of the law, and for that blood which, while it announced death as the sanction of its authority, could never cleanse the soul from sin.

Such was the Christian's position. The apostle wishes them grace and peace — the known portion of believers. He reminds them of the blessings with which God had blessed them, blessing God who had bestowed them. Believing Israelites knew Him now, not in the character of Jehovah, but as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That which the apostle presents as the fruit of His grace, is a hope beyond this world; not the inheritance of Canaan, appropriate to man living on the earth, which was the hope of Israel, and is still that of the unbelieving nation. The mercy of God had begotten them again for a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from out of the dead. This resurrection showed them a portion in another world, and the power which brought man into it, although he had been subjected to death: he would enter it by resurrection, through the glorious triumph of the Savior, to share an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. The apostle is not speaking of our resurrection with Christ; he views the Christian as a pilgrim here, encouraged by the triumph of Christ Himself in resurrection, which animated him by the consciousness that there was a world of light and happiness before him, and a power which would bring him into this world. Consequently the inheritance is spoken of as "reserved in heaven." In the epistle to the Ephesians we are seated in the heavens in Christ, and the inheritance is that of all things of which Christ Himself is heir. But the Christian is also in fact a pilgrim and a stranger on the earth; and it is a strong consolation to us, in our pilgrimage, to see this heavenly inheritance before us, as a certain pledge of our own entrance into it.

Another inestimable consolation is added. If the inheritance is preserved in heaven for us, we are kept by the power of God all through our pilgrimage that we may enjoy it at the end. Sweet thought! — we are kept here below through all our dangers and difficulties; and, on the other hand, the inheritance there, where there is no defilement or possibility of decay.

But it is by moral means that this power preserves us (and it is in this way that Peter always speaks), by the operation in us of grace, which fixes the heart on objects that keep it in connection with God and with His promise (compare 2 Peter 1:4). We are kept by the power of God through faith. It is, God be praised, the power of God Himself; but it acts by sustaining faith in the heart, maintaining it in spite of all temptations above all the defilement of the world, and filling the affection with heavenly things. Peter, however, always occupied with the ways of God respecting this world, only looks at the share that believers will have in this salvation, this heavenly glory, when it shall be manifested; when God will, by this glory, establish His authority in blessing on the earth. It is indeed the heavenly glory, but the heavenly glory manifested as the means of the establishment of the supreme government of God on earth, for His own glory and for the blessing of the whole world.

It is salvation ready to be revealed in the last times. This word “ready” is important. Our apostle says also that the judgment is ready to be revealed. Christ is glorified personally, has conquered all His enemies, has accomplished redemption. He only waits for one thing, namely, that God should make His enemies His footstool. He has taken His seat at the right hand of the Majesty on high, because He has accomplished everything as to glorifying God where sin was. It is the actual salvation of souls — the gathering together of His own, which is not yet finished (2 Peter 3:9, 15); but when once all they who are to share it are brought in, there is nothing to wait for as regards the salvation, that is to say, the glory in which the redeemed will appear;\* nor consequently as regards the judgment of the wicked on earth, which will be consummated by the manifestation of Christ.\*\* All is ready. This thought is sweet for us in our days of patience, but full of solemnity when we reflect upon the judgment.

[\* The doctrine of the gathering together of the saints to Jesus in the air, when they go to meet Him, forms no part of Peter’s teaching, any more than does that of the assembly on earth with which it is connected. He speaks of the manifestation of the saints in glory, because he is occupied with the ways of God towards the earth, although he is so in connection with Christianity.]

[\*\* See 2 Thessalonians 1:9, 10.]

Yes, as the apostle says, we rejoice greatly in this salvation, which is ready to be revealed in the last times. We are waiting for it. It is a time of rest, of

the earth's blessing, of the full manifestation of His glory who is worthy of it, who was humbled and who suffered for us; the time when the light and the glory of God in Christ will illumine the world, and first bind and then chase away all its evil.

This is our portion: abundant joy in the salvation about to be revealed, and in which we may always rejoice; although, if it be needed for our good, we may be in sorrow through divers temptations. But it is only for a very little while — only a light affliction, which passes away, and which only comes upon us if it be needful, in order that the precious trial of faith may have its result in praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ, for whom we are waiting. That is the end of all our sorrows and trials; transitory and light as they are, in comparison with the vast result of the excellent and eternal glory towards which they are leading us, according to the wisdom of God and the need of our souls. The heart attaches itself to Jesus: He will appear.

We love Him, although we have never seen Him. In Him, though now we see Him not, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. It is this which decides and forms the heart, which fixes it and fills it with joy, however it may be with us in this life. To our hearts it is He who fills all the glory. By grace I shall be glorified, I shall have the glory; but I love Jesus, my heart pants for His presence — desires to see Him. Moreover we shall be like Him, and He perfectly glorified. The apostle may well say, “unspeakable and full of glory.” The heart can desire nothing else: and if some light afflictions are needful for us, we endure them gladly, since they are a means of forming us for the glory. And we can rejoice at the thought of Christ's appearing; for in receiving Him, unseen, into our heart we receive the salvation of our soul. This is the object and the end of faith; far more precious than the temporal deliverances that Israel enjoyed, although the latter were tokens of the favor of God.

The apostle goes on to develop the three successive steps of the revelation of this grace of salvation — the full and entire deliverance from the consequences, the fruits, and the misery of sin: the prophecies; the testimony of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; the manifestation of Jesus Christ Himself, when the deliverance that had been already announced should be fully accomplished.

It is interesting to see here how the rejection of the Messiah, according to Jewish hopes, already anticipated and announced in the prophets, necessarily made way for a salvation which brought with it that of the soul likewise. Jesus was no more seen; the earthly portion was not realised by His first coming; salvation was to be revealed in the last times. But thus a salvation of the soul was unfolded, the whole extent of which would be realised in the glory about to be revealed; for it was the spiritual joy of the soul in a heavenly Jesus who was not seen, and who in His death had accomplished expiation for sin, and in His resurrection, according to the power of the life of the Son of God, had begotten again to a living hope. By faith then this salvation was received — this true deliverance. It was not yet the glory and the outward rest; that salvation would indeed take place when Jesus appeared, but meantime the soul already enjoyed by faith this perfect rest, and in hope even the glory itself.

Now the prophets had announced the grace of God which was to be accomplished for believers, and which even now imparts to the soul the enjoyment of that salvation; and they had searched into their own prophecies, which they had received by inspiration from God, seeking to understand what time, and what manner of time, the Spirit indicated, when He testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow. For the Spirit spoke of them both by the prophets, and signified consequently more than a temporal deliverance in Israel; for the Messiah was to suffer. And they discovered that it was not for themselves nor for their own times, that the Spirit of Christ announced these truths with regard to the Messiah, but for Christians. But Christians, while receiving the salvation of the soul by the revelation of a Christ seated in heaven after His sufferings and coming again in glory, have not received those glories which were revealed to the prophets. These things have been reported with great and divine plainness by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven after the death of Jesus: but the Spirit does not bestow the glory itself in which the Lord will appear; He has only declared it. Christians have therefore to gird up the loins of their mind, to be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that (in effect) will be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Such are the three successive steps in God's dealings: the prediction of the events relating to Christ, which went

altogether beyond Jewish blessings; the things reported by the Spirit; the accomplishment of the things promised when Christ is revealed.

That, then, which the apostle presents, is a participation in the glory of Christ when He shall be revealed; that salvation, of which the prophets had spoken, which was to be revealed in the last days. But meantime God had begotten again the believing Jews to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead; and by means of His sufferings had made them comprehend that even now, while waiting for the revelation of the glory, realising it in the Person of Jesus, they enjoyed a salvation of the soul before which the deliverances of Israel faded away and might be forgotten. It was indeed the salvation “ready to be revealed” in all its fullness; but as yet they only possessed it in respect of the soul. But, being detached from the manifestation of the earthly glory, this salvation had a yet more spiritual character. Therefore they were to gird up their loins, while waiting for the revelation of Jesus, and to acknowledge with thanksgiving that they were in possession of the end of their faith. They were in relationship with God.

When announcing these things by the ministry of the prophets, God had Christians in view, and not the prophets themselves. This grace was in due time to be communicated to believers; but meantime, for faith and for the soul, the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven bore testimony to it. It was to be brought at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus Christ, which was the guarantee of the accomplishment of all the promises and the power of life for their enjoyment, had begotten them again unto a living hope; but the right to enjoy the effect of the promise was founded on another truth. To this the exhortations conduct us. They were to walk as obedient children, no longer following the lusts that had led them in the days of their ignorance. Called by Him who is holy, they were to be holy in all their conversation, as it is written. Moreover, if they called on the Father, who, regardless of man’s pretension to respect, judged according to every one’s work, they were to pass the time of their sojourn here in fear.

Observe, here, that he is not speaking of the final judgment of the soul. In that sense “the Father judgeth no man, but has committed all judgment to the Son.” The thing spoken of here is the daily judgment of God’s government in this world, exercised with regard to His children.

Accordingly it says, “the time of your sojourn here.” It is a judgment applied to christian life. The fear spoken of is not an uncertainty as to salvation and redemption. It is a fear founded on the certainty that one is redeemed; and the immense price, the infinite value of the means employed for our redemption — namely, the blood of the Lamb, without blemish and without spot — is the motive for fearing God during our pilgrimage. We have been redeemed at the cost of the blood of Jesus from our vain conversation: can we then still walk according to the principles from which we have been thus delivered? Such a price for our deliverance demands that we should walk with circumspection and gravity before the Father, with whom we desire to have intercourse both as privilege and spiritual relationship.

The apostle then applies this truth to the Christians whom he was addressing. The Lamb had been ordained in the counsels of God before the world was made; but He was manifested in the last days for believers: and these are presented in their true character, they believe in God by Jesus — by this Lamb. It is not by means of the creation that they believe: although creation is a testimony to His glory, it gives no rest to the conscience and does not tell of a place in heaven. It is not by means of providence, which, even while directing all things, yet leaves the government of God in such profound darkness. Nor is it by means of the revelation of God on Mount Sinai under the name of Jehovah and the terror connected with a broken law. It is by means of Jesus, the Lamb of God, that we believe; observe that it is not said, in Him, but, “by Him” in God. We know God as the One who, when we were sinners and dead in our trespasses and sins, loved us, and gave this precious Savior to come down even into the death in which we were, to take part in our position as lying under this judgment, and die as the Lamb of God. We believe in God who by His power, when Jesus was there for us — in our stead — raised Him up from the dead and gave Him glory. It is in a Savior-God therefore, a God who exercises His power in our behalf, that we believe by Jesus, so that our faith and our hope are in God. It does not say in something before God, but in God Himself. Where then shall any cause for fear or distrust arise as regards God, if our faith and hope are in Himself? This changes everything. The aspect in which we view God Himself is entirely changed; and this change is founded on that which establishes the righteousness of God in accepting



us as cleansed from all sin, the love of God in blessing us perfectly in Jesus, whom His power has raised from the dead and glorified — the power according to which He blesses us. Our faith and our hope are in God Himself.

This places us in the most intimate of relationships with the rest of the redeemed: objects of the same love, washed by the same precious blood, redeemed by the same Lamb, they become — to those whose hearts are purified by the reception of the truth through the Spirit — the objects of a tender brotherly love, a love unfeigned. They are our brethren. Let us then love one another fervently with a pure heart. But this is based on another essentially vital principle. It is a new nature which acts in this affection. If we are redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb without spot, we are born of the incorruptible seed of the word of God, which lives and abides for ever. For the flesh is but grass, the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withers, its flower falls, but the word of the Lord abides for ever. This is the word of the gospel which has been preached unto us. It is an eternal principle of blessing. The believer is not born after the flesh to enjoy temporary rights and blessings, as was the case with a Jew, but of an incorruptible seed, a principle of life as unchangeable as the word of God Himself. The prophet had told them so, when comforting the people of God; all flesh, the nation itself, was but withered grass. God was unchangeable, and the word which by its immutable certainty secured divine blessings to the objects of God's favor, wrought in the heart to beget a life as immortal and incorruptible as the word which is its source.

Thus cleansed therefore and born of the word, they were to put off all fraud, hypocrisy, envy, slander; and, as new-born babes, to seek for this milk of the understanding, in order to grow thereby (for the word is the milk of the child, as it was the seed of its life); and we are to receive it as babes in all simplicity, if in truth we have felt that the Lord is good and full of grace. It is not Sinai (where the Lord God declared His law from the midst of the fire, so that they entreated not to hear His voice any more), to which I am come, or from which the Lord is speaking. If I have tasted and understood that the Lord acts in grace, that He is love towards me, and that His word is the expression of that grace, even as it communicates life, I shall desire to feed on this milk of the understanding, which the believer enjoys in proportion to his simplicity; that good word which announces to

me nothing but grace, and the God whom I need as all grace, full of grace, acting in grace, as revealing Himself to me in this character — a character which He can never cease to maintain towards me, making me a partaker of His holiness.

I now know the Lord Himself: I have tasted that which He is. Moreover this is still in contrast with the legal condition of the Jew, although it is the fulfillment of that which the Psalms and the prophets had declared (the resurrection having plainly revealed in addition a heavenly hope). It was they themselves who were now the spiritual house, the holy priesthood. They came to the Living Stone, rejected indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, and they were built up on Him as living stones. The apostle delights in this word “living.” It was to him the Father had revealed that Jesus was the Son of the living God. No one else had then confessed Him as such, and the Lord told him that on this rock (that is, on the Person of the Son of God in power of life, manifested in the resurrection, which declared Him to be such) He would build His assembly. Peter, by his faith, participated in the nature of this living rock. Here then (chap. 2:5) he extends this character to all believers, and exhibits the holy house built on the Living Stone, which God Himself had laid as the chief corner-stone elect and precious. Whosoever believed in Him should not be confounded.\*

[\* In this passage, so to speak (as in this alone), Peter meets the doctrine of the assembly, and that under the character of a building, not of a body or a bride; that which Christ built, not what was united to Him. So Paul also presents it to us in Ephesians 2:20, 21. In this view, though going on earth, it is Christ’s work and a continuing process; no human instrumentality is referred to: I will build, says Christ; it grows, says Paul; living stones come, says Peter. This must not be confounded with the building into which men may build wood and hay and stubble, as the same thing; though the outward thing which God set up good, left to man’s responsibility, as ever, was soon corrupted. Individuals are built up by grace, and it grows into a holy temple. All this refers to Matthew 16. The responsibility of human service in this respect is found in 1 Corinthians 3, and the assembly is there given in another point of view. The body is another thing altogether; the doctrine is taught in Ephesians 1-4; 1 Corinthians 12, and other passages.]

Now, it was not only in the eyes of God that this Stone was precious, but in the eyes of faith which — feeble as the possessors of it may be — sees as God sees. To unbelievers this stone was a stone of stumbling and of offense. They stumbled at the word, being disobedient, to which also they were appointed. It does not say that they were appointed to sin nor to

condemnation, but these unbelieving and disobedient sinners, the Jewish race — long rebellious, and continually exalting themselves against God — were destined to find in the Lord of grace Himself a rock of offense; and to stumble and fall upon that which was to faith the precious stone of salvation. It was to this particular fall that their unbelief was destined.

Believers, on the contrary, entered into the enjoyment of the promises made to Israel, and that in the most excellent way. Grace — and the very faithfulness of God — had brought the fulfillment of the promise in the Person of Jesus, the minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to fulfill the promises made to the fathers. And, although the nation had rejected Him, God would not deprive of the blessings those who — in spite of all this difficulty to faith and to the heart — had submitted to the obedience of faith, and attached themselves to Him who was the despised of the nation. They could not have the blessing of Israel with the nation on earth, because the nation had rejected Him; but they were brought fully into the relationship with God of a people accepted of Him. The heavenly character which the blessing now assumed did not destroy their acceptance according to the promise; only they entered into it according to grace. For the nation, as a nation, had lost it; not only long ago by disobedience, but now by rejecting Him who came in grace to impart to them the effect of the promise.

The apostle, therefore, applies the character of “holy nation” to the elect remnant, investing them in the main with the titles bestowed in Exodus 19 on condition of obedience, but here in connection with the Messiah, their enjoyment of these titles being founded on His obedience and rights acquired by their faith in Him.

But, the privileges of the believing remnant being founded on the Messiah, the apostle goes farther, and applies to them the declarations of Hose — a, which relate to Israel and Judah when re-established in the fullness of blessing in the last days, enjoying those relationships with God into which grace will bring them at that time.

“Ye are,” he says, “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a purchased people.” These are almost the words of Exodus 19. He goes on: “Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God; who formerly had not obtained mercy, but have now obtained it.” These are the words of

Hose — a 2. This sets before us, in the most interesting way, the principle on which the blessing is founded. In Exodus the people were to have this blessing if they exactly obeyed the voice of God. But Israel had not obeyed, had been rebellious and stiff-necked, had gone after strange gods, and rejected the testimony of the Spirit; yet, after their unfaithfulness, God Himself has laid in Zion a Stone, a chief corner-stone, and whosoever believed in Him should not be confounded. It is grace that, when Israel had failed in every respect, and on the ground of obedience, had lost everything, God should bestow on them by Jesus, through grace, that which was promised them at first on condition of obedience. In this way all was secured to them.

The question of obedience was settled — on Israel's disobedience — by grace, and by the obedience of Christ, the foundation laid by God in Zion. But this principle of grace abounding over sin — by which is shown the inability of disobedience to frustrate the purposes of God, for this grace came after the completion of disobedience — this principle, so glorious and so comforting to the convinced sinner, is confirmed in a striking way by the quotation from Hose — a. In this passage from the prophet, Israel is presented, not merely as guilty, but as having already undergone judgment. God had declared that He would no more have mercy (with regard to His patience toward the ten tribes); and that Israel was no longer His people (in His judgment on unfaithful Judah). But afterwards, when the judgment had been executed, He returns to His irrevocable purposes of grace, and allures Israel as a forsaken wife, and gives her the valley of Achor — the valley of trouble, in which Achan was stoned, the first judgment on unfaithful Israel after their entrance into the promised land — for a door of hope. For judgment is changed into grace, and God begins all afresh upon a new principle. It was as though Israel had again come up out of Egypt, but upon an entirely new principle. He betroths her to Him for ever, in righteousness, in judgment, in grace, in mercy, and all is blessing. Then He calls her “Ruhama,” or, “the object of mercy”; and “Ammi,” “my people.”

These, then, are the expressions which the apostle uses, applying them to the remnant who believed in Jesus, the stumbling-stone to the nation, but the chief corner-stone from God to the believer. Thus the condition is taken away, and instead of a condition we have blessing after disobedience,

and after judgment the full and assured grace of God, founded (in its application to believers) on the Person, the obedience, and the work of Christ.

It is affecting to see the expression of this grace in the term “Achor.” It was the first judgment on Israel in the land of promise for having profaned themselves with the forbidden thing. And there it is that hope is given; so entirely true is it that grace triumphs over justice. And it is this which has taken place in the most excellent way in Christ. The very judgment of God becomes in Him the door of hope, the guilt and the judgment having alike passed away for ever.

Two parts of the christian life — so far as it is the manifestation of spiritual power — result from this, in the double priesthood; of which the one answers to the present position of Christ on high, and the other anticipatively to the manifestation of His glory on earth — the priestoods of Aaron, and of Melchisedec. For He is now within the veil according to the type of Aaron; hereafter He will be a priest on His throne — it will be the public manifestation of His glory on earth. Thus the saints exercise “a holy priesthood” (v. 5) to offer up spiritual sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. Sweet privilege of the Christian, thus brought as near as possible to God! He offers — sure of being accepted, for it is by Jesus that he offers them — his sacrifices to God.

This part of the christian life is the first, the most excellent, the most vital, the source of the other (which is its expression here below); the most excellent, because, in its exercise, we are in immediate connection with the divine object of our affections. These spiritual sacrifices are the reflex, by the action of the Holy Ghost, of the grace which we enjoy; that which the heart returns to God, moved by the excellent gifts of which we are the object, and by the love which has given them. The heart (by the power of the Holy Ghost) reflects all that has been revealed to it in grace, worshipping the Author and Giver of all according to the knowledge we have of Himself through this means; the fruits of the heavenly Canaan in which we participate presented as an offering to God; the entrance of the soul into the presence of God to praise and adore Him.

This is the holy priesthood, according to the analogy of the priesthood of Aaron, and of the temple at Jerusalem which God inhabited as His house.

The second priesthood of which the apostle speaks is to show forth the virtues of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. Its description is taken, as we have seen, from Exodus 19. It is a chosen generation, a holy nation, a royal priesthood. I only allude to the Melchisedec priesthood to show the character of a royal priesthood. Priests, among the Jews, drew near to God. God had formed the people for Himself: they were to show forth all His virtues, His praises Christ will do this perfectly in the day of His glory. The Christian is called to do it now in this world. He is to reproduce Christ in this world. It is the second part of his life.

It will be noticed that the first chapter of this epistle presents the Christian as animated by hope, but under trial — the precious trial of faith. The second chapter presents him in his privileges as of a holy and royal priesthood, by means of faith.

After this (chap. 2:11), the apostle begins his exhortations. Whatever may be the privileges of the Christian, in his position as such, he is always viewed as a pilgrim, on the earth; and, as we have seen, the constant government of God is the object which presents itself to the mind of the apostle. But he warns them first, with regard to that which is inward, against those sources from which the corruptions spring, that (in the scene of this government) would dishonor the name of God and even bring in judgment.

Their conversation was to be honest among the Gentiles. Christians bore the name of God. The mind of men, hostile to His name, sought to bring disgrace upon it, by attributing to Christians the evil conduct which they themselves followed without remorse, while at the same time complaining (chap. 4:4) that they would not go with them in the same excesses and disorder. The Christian had only to follow the path of faithfulness to God. In the day when God would visit men these calumniators, with their will broken and their pride subdued by the visitation of God, should be brought to confess — by means of the good works which, in spite of their calumnies, had always reached their consciences — that God had acted in these Christians, that He had been present among them.

After this general exhortation, brief but important to believers, the apostle takes up the relative walk of Christians in a world where on the one hand

God watches over all, yet where He permits His own to suffer, whether for righteousness sake or for the name of Christ, but where they ought never to suffer for having done wrong. The path then of the Christian is marked out. He is subject for the Lord's sake to human ordinances or institutions. He gives honor to all men, and to each in his place, so that no one shall have any reproach to bring against him. He is submissive to his masters, even if they are bad men, and yields to their ill-treatment. Were he subject only to the good and gentle, a worldly slave would do as much; but if, having done well, he suffers and bears it patiently, this is acceptable to God, this is grace. It was thus that Christ acted, and to this we are called. Christ suffered in this way, and never replied by reproaches or threats to those who molested Him, but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously. To Him we belong. He has suffered for our sins, in order that, having been delivered from them, we should live to God. These Christians from among the Jews had been as sheep going astray;\* they were now brought back to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. But how entirely these exhortations show that the Christian is one who is not of this world, but has his own path through it: yet this path was the way of peace in it!

[\* An allusion, I suppose, to the last verse of Psalm 119. The apostle constantly puts the christian Jews on the ground of the blessed remnant, only making it a soul salvation.]

Likewise, wives were to be subject to their husbands in all modesty and purity, in order that this testimony to the effect of the word by its fruits might take the place of the word itself, if their husbands would not listen to it. They were to rest, in patience and meekness, on the faithfulness of God, and not be alarmed at seeing the power of the adversaries (compare Philippians 1:28).

Husbands were in like manner to dwell with the wife, their affections and relationships being governed by christian knowledge, and not by any human passion; honoring the wife, and walking with her as being heirs together of the grace of life.

Finally, all were to walk in the spirit of peace and gentleness, carrying with them, in their intercourse with others, the blessing of which they were themselves the heirs, the spirit of which they ought consequently to bear ever with them. By following that which is good, by having the tongue governed by the fear of the Lord, by avoiding evil and seeking peace, they

would in quietness enjoy the present life under the eye of God. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who, moreover, would harm them, if they followed only that which is good?

This, then, is the government of God, the principle on which He superintends the course of this world. Nevertheless it is not now a direct and immediate government preventing all wrong. The power of evil still acts upon the earth; those who are animated by it show themselves hostile to the righteous, and act by means of that fear which Satan is able to produce. But by giving the Lord His place in the soul, this fear which the enemy excites has no longer a place there. If the heart is conscious of the presence of God, can that heart tremble at the presence of the enemy? This is the secret of boldness and peace in confessing Christ. Then the instruments of the enemy seek to turn us aside, and to overwhelm us by their pretensions; but the consciousness of God's presence dissipates those pretensions, and destroys all their power. Resting on the strength of His presence, we are ready to answer those who ask the reason of our hope, with meekness and holy reverence remote from all levity. For all this it is necessary to have a good conscience. We may carry a bad conscience to God, that He may pardon and have mercy on us; but if we have a bad conscience, we cannot resist the enemy — we are afraid of him. On the one hand, we fear his malice; on the other, we have lost the consciousness of the presence and the strength of God. When walking before God, we fear nothing; the heart is free: we have not to think of self, we think of God; and the adversaries are ashamed of having falsely accused those whose conduct is unblamable, and against whom nothing can be brought except the calumny of their enemies, which calumnies turn to their own shame.

It may be that God may see it good that we should suffer. If so, it is better that we should suffer for well doing than for evil doing. The apostle gives a touching motive for this: Christ has suffered for sins once for all; let that suffice; let us suffer only for righteousness. To suffer for sin was His task; He accomplished it, and that for ever; put to death, as to His life in the flesh, but quickened according to the power of the divine Spirit.

The passage that follows has occasioned difficulties to the readers of scripture; but it appears to me simple, if we perceive the object of the



Spirit of God. The Jews expected a Messiah corporeally present, who should deliver the nation, and exalt the Jews to the summit of earthly glory. But He was not present, we know, in that manner, and the believing Jews had to endure the scoffs and the hatred of the unbelieving, on account of their trust in a Messiah who was not present, and who had wrought no deliverance for the people. Believers possessed the salvation of their soul, and they knew Jesus in heaven; but unbelieving men did not care for that. The apostle therefore cites the case of Noah's testimony. The believing Jews were few in number, and Christ was theirs only according to the Spirit. By the power of that Spirit He had been raised up from the dead. It was by the power of the same Spirit that He had gone — without being corporeally present — to preach in Noah. The world was disobedient (like the Jews in the apostle's days), and eight souls only were saved; even as the believers were now but a little flock. But the spirits of the disobedient were now in prison, because they did not obey Christ present among them by His Spirit in Noah. The long-suffering of God waited then, as now, with the Jewish nation; the result would be the same. It has been so.

This interpretation is confirmed (in preference to that which supposes that the Spirit of Christ preached in hades to souls which had been confined there ever since the flood) by the consideration that in Genesis it is said, "My spirit shall not always strive with men, but their days shall be a hundred and twenty years." That is to say, His Spirit should strive, in the testimony of Noah, during a hundred and twenty years and no longer. Now it would be an extraordinary thing that with those persons only (for he speaks only of them) the Lord should strive in testimony after their death. Moreover, we may observe that, in considering this expression to mean the Spirit of Christ in Noah, we only use a well-known phrase of Peter's; for he it is, as we have seen, who said, "The Spirit of Christ which was in the prophets."

These spirits then are in prison, because they did not hearken to the Spirit of Christ in Noah (compare 2 Peter 2:5-9). To this the apostle adds, the comparison of baptism to the ark of Noah in the deluge. Noah was saved through the water; we also; for the water of baptism typifies death, as the deluge, so to speak, was the death of the world. Now Christ has passed through death and is risen. We enter into death in baptism; but it is like the ark, because Christ suffered in death for us, and has come out of it in

resurrection, as Noah came out of the deluge, to begin, as it were, a new life in a resurrection world. Now Christ, having passed through death, has atoned for sins; and we, by passing through it in spirit, leave all our sins in it, as Christ did in reality for us; for He was raised up without the sins which He expiated on the cross. And they were our sins; and thus, through the resurrection, we have a good conscience. We pass through death in spirit and in figure by baptism. The peace-giving force of the thing is the resurrection of Christ, after He had accomplished expiation; by which resurrection therefore we have a good conscience.

Now this is what the Jews had to learn. The Christ was gone up to heaven, all powers and principalities being made subject to Him. He is at the right hand of God. We have therefore not a Messiah on earth, but a good conscience and a heavenly Christ.

**CHAPTER 4.** From the beginning of this chapter to the end of verse 7, the apostle continues to speak of the general principles of God's government, exhorting the Christian to act on the principles of Christ Himself, which would cause him to avoid the walk condemned by that government, while waiting for the judgment of the world by the Christ whom he served. Christ glorified, as we saw at the close of the previous chapter, was ready to judge; and they who were exasperated against the Christians, and who were led by their own passions, without caring for the coming judgment, would have to give account to that Judge whom they refused to own as Savior.

Here, it will be observed, it is suffering for righteousness sake (chap. 2:19; 3:17) in connection with the government and judgment of God. The principle was this: they accepted, they followed the Savior whom the world and the nation rejected; they walked in His holy footsteps in righteousness, as pilgrims and strangers, abandoning the corruption that reigned in the world. Walking in peace and following after good, they avoided to a certain extent the attacks of others; and the eyes of Him, who watches from on high over all things, rested upon the righteous. Nevertheless, in the relations of ordinary life (chap. 2:18), and in their intercourse with men, they might have to suffer, and to bear flagrant injustice. Now the time of God's judgment was not yet come. Christ was in heaven; He had been rejected on the earth, and the Christian's part was

to follow him. The time of the manifestation of the government of God would be at the judgment which Christ should execute. Meanwhile His walk on earth had furnished the pattern of that which the God of judgment approved (chap. 2:21-23; 4:1 and following verses).

They were to do good, to suffer for it, and to be patient. This is well-pleasing to God; this is what Christ did. It was better that they should suffer for doing well, if God saw fit, than for doing ill. Christ (chap. 2:24) had born our sins, had suffered for our sins, the Just for the unjust, in order that we, being dead to sins, should live for righteousness, and in order to bring us unto God Himself. Christ is now on high; He is ready to judge. When the judgment shall come, the principles of God's government will be manifested and shall prevail.

The beginning of chapter 4 requires some rather more detailed remarks. The death of Christ is there applied to practical death unto sins; a state presented in contrast with the life of the Gentiles.

Christ on the cross (the apostle alludes to verse 18 of the preceding chapter) suffered in the flesh for us. He died in fact as regards His human life. We must arm ourselves with the same mind, and allow of no activity of life or passions according to the will of the old man, but suffer as to the flesh, never yielding to its will. Sin is the action in us of the will of the flesh, the will of the man as alive in this world. When this will acts, the principle of sin is there; for we ought to obey. The will of God ought to be the spring of our moral life; and so much the more, because now that we have the knowledge of good and evil — now that the will of the flesh, unsubject to God, is in us, we must either take the will of God as our only motive, or act according to the will of the flesh, for the latter is always present in us.

Christ came to obey, He chose to die, to suffer all things rather than not obey. He thus died to sin, which never for a moment found an entrance into His heart. With Him, tempted to the uttermost, death was preferred rather than disobedience, even when death had the character of wrath against sin and judgment. Bitter as the cup was, He drank it rather than not fulfill to the uttermost His Father's will, and glorify Him. Tried to the uttermost and perfect in it, the temptation which ever assailed Him from without and sought entrance (for He had none within) was always kept

outside; was never entered into, nor found a movement of His will towards it; drew out obedience, or the perfection of the divine thoughts in man; and by dying, by suffering in the flesh, He had done with it all, done with sin for ever, and entered for ever into rest, after having been tried to the uttermost, and tempted in all things similarly to us,\* as regards the trial of faith, the conflict of the spiritual life.

[\* It is not, as in the Authorised Version, “yet without sin,” true as that may be, but “sin apart.” We are tempted, being led away by our own lusts. Christ had all our difficulties, all our temptations, on the way, but had nothing in Himself which could lead Him wrong — far surely from it — nothing which answered to the temptation.]

Now it is the same thing with respect to ourselves in daily life. If I suffer in the flesh, the will of the flesh is assuredly not in action; and the flesh, in that I suffer, is practically dead — I have nothing more to do with sins.\* We then are freed from it, have done with it, and are at rest. If we are content to suffer, the will does not act; sin is not there, as to fact; for to suffer is not will, it is grace acting in accordance with the image and the mind of Christ in the new man; and we are freed from the action of the old man. It does not act; we rest from it; we have done with it, no longer to live, for the remainder of our life here below in the flesh, according to the lusts of man, but according to the will of God, which the new man follows.

[\* Peter rests on the effect; Paul, as ever, goes to the root, Romans 6.]

It is enough to have spent the past time of our lives in doing the will of the Gentiles (he still speaks to Christians of the circumcision), and in committing the excesses to which they addicted themselves, while they wondered at Christians for refusing to do the same; speaking evil of them for this reason. But they would have to give account to Him, who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

The Jews were accustomed to the judgment of the living, for they were the center of God’s government on the earth. The judgment of the dead, with which we are more familiar, had not been definitely revealed to them. They were liable nevertheless to this judgment; for it was with this object that the promises of God were presented to them while living, in order that they might either live according to God in the spirit, or be judged as men responsible for what they had done in the flesh. For the one or other of these results would be produced in every one who heard the promises.

Thus, in regard to the Jews, the judgment of the dead would take place in connection with the promises that had been set before them. For this testimony from God placed all who heard it under responsibility, so that they would be judged as men who had to give account to God of their conduct in the flesh, unless they came out of this position of life in the flesh by being quickened through the power of the word addressed to them, applied by the energy of the Spirit; so that they escaped from the flesh through the spiritual life which they received.

Now the end of all things was at hand. The apostle, while speaking of the great principle of responsibility in connection with the testimony of God, draws the attention of believers to the solemn thought of the end of all these things on which the flesh rested. This end drew near.

Here, observe, Peter presents, not the coming of the Lord to receive His own, nor His manifestation with them, but that moment of the solemn sanction of the ways of God, when every refuge of the flesh shall disappear, and all the thoughts of man perish for ever.

As regards the relations of God with the world in government, the destruction of Jerusalem, although it was not “the end,” was of immense importance, because it destroyed the very seat of that government on the earth in which the Messiah ought to have reigned, and shall yet reign.

God watches over all things, takes care of His own, counts the hairs of their heads, makes everything contribute to their highest good; but this is in the midst of a world which He no longer owns. For not only is the earthly and direct government of God set aside, which took place in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, and, in a certain sense, in those of Saul; but the Messiah, who ought to reign in it, has been rejected, and has taken the heavenly place in resurrection, which forms the subject of this epistle.

The destruction of Jerusalem (which was to take place in those days) was the final abolition of even the traces of that government, until the Lord shall return. The relations of an earthly people with God, on the ground of man’s responsibility, were ended. The general government of God took the place of the former; a government always the same in principle, but which, Jesus having suffered on the earth, still allowed His members to suffer here below. And, until the time of judgment, the wicked will persecute the

righteous, and the righteous must have patience. With regard to the nation, those relations only subsisted till the destruction of Jerusalem; the unbelieving hopes of the Jews, as a nation, were judicially overthrown. The apostle speaks here in a general way, and in view of the effect of the solemn truth of the end of all things, for Christ is still “ready to judge”; and if there is delay, it is because God wills not the death of the sinner, and that He prolongs the time of grace.

In view of this end of all that we see, we ought to be sober, and watch in order to pray. We ought to have the heart thus exercised towards God, who changes not, who will never pass away, and who preserves us through all the difficulties and temptations of this passing scene until the day of deliverance which is coming. Instead of allowing ourselves to be carried away by present and visible things, we must bridle self and will and commune with God.

This leads the apostle to the inner position of Christians their relations among themselves, not with God’s general government of the world. They follow, because they are Christians, Christ Himself. The first thing that he enforces on them is fervent charity; not merely long-suffering, which would prevent any outbreak of the anger of the flesh, but an energy of love, which by stamping its character on all the ways of Christians towards each other, would practically set aside the action of the flesh, and make manifest the divine presence and action.

Now thus love covered a multitude of sins. He is not speaking here with a view to ultimate pardon, but of the present notice which God takes — His present relations of government with His people; for we have present relationships with God. If the assembly is at variance, if there is little love, if the intercourse among Christians is with straitened hearts and difficult the existing evil, the mutual wrongs, subsist before God: but if there is love, which neither commits nor resents any wrongs, but pardons such things, and only finds in them occasion for its own exercise, it is then the love which the eye of God rests upon, and not the evil. Even if there are misdeeds — sins — love occupies itself about them, the offender is brought back, is restored, by the charity of the assembly; the sins are removed from the eye of God, they are covered. It is a quotation from the book of Proverbs 10:12: “Hatred stirreth up strife, but love covereth all

sins.” We have a right to forgive them — to wash the feet of our brother (compare James 5:15, and 1 John 5:16). We not only forgive, but love maintains the assembly before God according to His own nature so that He can bless it.

Christians ought to exercise hospitality towards each other with all liberality. It is the expression of love, and tends much to maintain it: we are no longer strangers to each other.

Gifts come next after the exercise of grace. All comes from God. As every one had received the gift, he was to serve in the gift, as a steward of the varied grace of God. It is God who gives; the Christian is a servant, and under responsibility as a steward, on God’s part. He is to ascribe all to God, in a direct way to God. If he speaks, he is to speak as an oracle of God; that is, as speaking on God’s part, and not from himself. If any one serves in things temporal, let him do it as in a power and an ability that come from God, so that, whether one speaks or serves, God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To Him, the apostle adds, be praise and dominion.

After these exhortations he comes to suffering for the name of Christ. They were not to view the fiery persecutions that came to try them, as some strange thing that had befallen them. On the contrary, they were connected with a suffering and rejected Christ; they partook therefore in His sufferings, and were to rejoice in it. He would soon appear, and these sufferings for His sake should turn to their exceeding joy at the revelation of His glory. They were therefore to rejoice at sharing His sufferings, in order to be filled with abounding joy when His glory should be revealed. If they were reproached for the name of Christ, it was happy for them. The Spirit of God rested on them. It was the name of Christ that brought reproach on them. He was in the glory with God; the Spirit, who came from that glory and that God, filled them with joy in bearing the reproach. It was Christ who was reproached — Christ who was glorified — reproached by the enemies of the gospel, while Christians had the joy of glorifying Him. It will be observed, that in this passage, it is for Christ Himself (as it has been said) that the believer suffers; and, therefore, the apostle speaks of glory and joy at the appearing of Jesus Christ, which he

does not mention in chapters 2:20; 3:17 (compare Matthew 5:10 and v. 11, 12 of the same chapter).

As an evil-doer then the Christian ought never to suffer; but if he suffered as a Christian, he was not to be ashamed, but to glorify God for it. The apostle then returns to the government of God; for these sufferings of believers had also another character. To the individual who suffered, it was a glory: he shared the sufferings of Christ, and the Spirit of glory and of God rested on him; and all this should turn to abounding joy when the glory was revealed. But God had no pleasure in allowing His people to suffer. He permitted it; and if Christ had to suffer for us when He who knew no sin did not need it for Himself, the people of God have often need on their own account to be exercised with suffering. God uses the wicked, the enemies of the name of Christ, for this purpose. Job is the book that explains this, independently of all dispensations. But in every form of God's dealings, He exercises His judgments according to the order He has established. He did so with Israel; He does so with the assembly. The latter has a heavenly portion; and if she attaches herself to the earth, God allows the enemy to trouble her. Perhaps the individual who suffers is full of faith and devoted love to the Lord; but under persecution, the heart feels that the world is not its rest, that it must have its portion elsewhere, its strength elsewhere. We are not of the world which persecutes us. If the faithful servant of God is cut off from this world by persecution, it strengthens faith, for God is in it; but they from the midst of whom he is cut off, suffer and feel that the hand of God was in it: His dealings take the form of judgment, always in perfect love, but in discipline.

God judges everything according to His own nature. He desires that all should be in accordance with His nature. No upright and honorable man would like to have the wicked near him, and always before him; God assuredly would not. And in that which is nearest to Him, He must above all desire that everything should correspond to His nature and His holiness — to all that He is. I would have everything around me clean enough not to disgrace me; but in my own house I must have such cleanness as I personally desire. Thus judgment must begin at the house of God: the apostle alludes to Ezekiel 9:6. It is a solemn principle. No grace, no privilege, changes the nature of God; and everything must be conformed to that nature, or, in the end, must be banished from His presence. Grace can



conform us, and it does. It bestows the divine nature, so that there is a principle of absolute conformity to God. But as to practical conformity in thought and deed, the heart and the conscience must be exercised, in order that the understanding of the heart, and the habitual desires and aspirations of the will, should be formed upon the revelation of God, and continually directed towards Him.

Now if this conformity should so fail that the testimony of God is injured by its absence, God, who judges His people, and who will judge evil everywhere, does so by means of the chastisements which He inflicts. Judgment begins at the house of God. The righteous are saved with difficulty. It is evidently not redemption or justification that is here intended, nor the communication of life: those whom the apostle addresses were in possession of them. To our apostle “salvation” is not only the present enjoyment of the salvation of the soul, but the full deliverance of the faithful, which will take place at the coming of Christ in glory. All the temptations are contemplated, all the trials, all the dangers, through which the Christian will pass in reaching the end of his career. All the power of God is requisite, directed by divine wisdom, guiding and sustaining faith, to carry the Christian safely through the wilderness, where Satan employs all the resources of his subtlety to make him perish. The power of God will accomplish it; but, from the human point of view, the difficulties are almost insurmountable. Now, if the righteous — according to the ways of God, who must maintain His judgment conformable to the principles of good and evil in His government; and who will in nowise deny Himself in dealing with the enemy of our souls — if the righteous were saved with difficulty, what would become of the sinner and the ungodly? To join them would not be the way to escape these difficulties. In suffering as a Christian, there was but one thing to do — to commit oneself to Him who watched over the judgment that He was executing. For, as it was His hand, one suffered according to His will. It was this that Christ did.

Observe here, that it is not only the government of God, but there is the expression, “as unto a faithful Creator.” The Spirit of God moves here in this sphere. It is the relationship of God with this world, and the soul knows Him as the One who created it, and who does not forsake the work of His hands. This is Jewish ground — God known in His connection with the first creation. Trust in Him is founded on Christ; but God is known in

His ways with this world, and with us in our pilgrimage here below, where He governs, and where He judges Christians, as He will judge all others.

**CHAPTER 5.** The apostle returns to christian details. He exhorts the elders, himself an elder; for it appears that among the Jews this title was rather characteristic than official (compare v. 5). He exhorts them to feed the flock of God. The apostle designates himself as one who had been a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and who was to be a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. It was the function of the twelve to be witnesses of the life of Christ (John 15), as it was that of the Holy Ghost to testify of His heavenly glory. Peter places himself at the two ends of the Lord's history, and leaves the interval devoid of all except hope, and the pilgrimage towards an end. He had seen the sufferings of Christ; he was to share His glory when he should be revealed. It is a Christ who puts Himself in relation with the Jews, now known only by faith. During His life on earth, He was in the midst of the Jews although suffering there and rejected. When He shall appear, He will again be in relation with the earth and with that nation.

Paul speaks differently, while at the same time confirming these truths. He only knew the Lord after His exaltation; he is not a witness of His sufferings; but he seeks for the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. Paul's heart is bound to Christ while He is in heaven, as united to Him above; and, although he desires the Lord's appearing for the restitution of all things of which the prophets had spoken he rejoices to know that he shall go with joy to meet Him, and shall return with Him when He is revealed from heaven.

The elders were to feed the flock of God with a ready mind and not as by constraint, nor for gain, nor as governing an inheritance of their own, but as ensamples to the flock. Loving care was to be lavished upon it, for the sake of Christ, the chief Shepherd, with a view to the good of souls. Moreover it was the flock of God which they were to feed. What a solemn as well as sweet thought! How impossible for anyone to entertain the notion of its being his flock, if he has laid hold of the thought that it is the flock of God, and that God allows us to feed it!

We may observe that the heart of the blessed apostle is where the Lord had placed it. "Feed my sheep" was the expression of the Lord's perfect

grace towards Peter, when He was leading him to the humiliating but salutary confession that it needed the eye of God to see that His weak disciple loved Him. At the moment that He convinced him of his utter nothingness, He entrusted to him that which was dearest to Himself.

Thus we see, here, that it is the apostle's care, the desire of the heart, that they should feed the flock. Here, as elsewhere, he does not go beyond the Lord's appearing. It is at that period that the ways of God in government — of which the Jews were the earthly center — shall be fully manifested. Then shall the crown of glory be presented to him that has been faithful, that has satisfied the chief Shepherd's heart.

The young were to submit themselves to those who were older, and all to one another. All were to be clothed with humility: for God resists the proud, and gives grace to the humble. These are still the principles of His government. Under His hand they were therefore to humble themselves; they should be exalted in due time. This was to commit themselves to God. He knew what was needful. He who loved them would exalt them at the right time. He cared for them; they were to rest on Him, commit all their cares to Him.

On the other hand, they were to be sober and vigilant, because the adversary sought to devour them. Here — whatever may be his wiles, however he may lie in wait for Christians — it is in the character of a roaring lion, one who excites open persecution, that the apostle presents him. They were to resist him, steadfast in the faith. Everywhere the same afflictions were found. Nevertheless the God of grace is the Christian's confidence. He has called us to participate in His eternal glory. The apostle's desire for them is, that, after they had suffered for a time, the God of grace should make them perfect, complete — should stablish and strengthen them, building up their hearts on the foundation of an assurance that cannot be shaken. To Him, he adds, be glory and dominion.

We see that the Christians to whom he wrote were suffering, and that the apostle explained these sufferings on the principles of the divine government, with regard especially to the relation of Christians with God, as being His house, whether those sufferings were for righteousness' sake, or for the name of the Lord. It was but for a time. The Christian's hope was elsewhere; christian patience was well-pleasing to God. It was their

glory, if it was for the name of Christ. Besides which, God judged His house, and watched over His people.

## 2 PETER

The second epistle of Peter is even more simple than the first. Like those of Jude and John, it is written essentially with a view to the seducers, who, with large promises of liberty, beguiled souls into sin and licentiousness, denying the coming of Christ, and in fact disowning all His rights over them. The epistle admonishes the same Christians to whom the first was written, pointing out the characteristic features of these false teachers; denouncing them with the utmost energy; explaining the long-sufferance of God, and announcing a judgment which, like His patience, would befit the majesty of Him who was to execute it.

## 2 PETER

But before giving these warnings, which begin with chapter 2, the apostle exhorts Christians to make their own calling and election sure — not evidently in the heart of God, but as a fact in their own hearts, and in practical life, by walking in such a manner as not to stumble; so that testimony to their portion in Christ should be always evident, and an abundant entrance be ministered to them.

These exhortations are founded, firstly, on that which is already given to Christians; secondly, on that which is future — namely, the manifestation of the glory of the kingdom. In touching upon this last subject, he indicates a still more excellent portion — the bright morning star, the heavenly Christ Himself and our association with Him before He appears as the Sun of righteousness. Thirdly, we shall see that the warnings are founded also on another basis — namely, the dissolution of the heavens and the earth, proving the instability of all that unbelief rested upon, and furnishing for the same reason a solemn warning to the saints to induce them to walk in holiness.

The apostle describes his brethren as having obtained the same precious faith as himself through the faithfulness of God\* to the promises made to the fathers, for that surely is the force of the word “righteousness” in this

place. The faithfulness of the God of Israel had bestowed on His people this faith (that is to say, Christianity), which was so precious to them.

[\* This passage may be translated “of our God and Savior Jesus Christ,” and perhaps ought to be so rendered since it speaks of the faithfulness of God to His promise. The epistle to the Hebrews dwells also on the fact that Jesus is Jehovah.]

Faith here is the portion we have now in the things that God gives, which in Christianity are revealed as truths, while the things promised are not yet come. It was in this way that the believing Jews were to possess the Messiah, and all that God gave in Him, as the Lord had said, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. There are many mansions in my Father’s house; I go to prepare a place for you.” That is to say, “You do not visibly possess God; you enjoy Him by believing in Him. It is the same with respect to Me: you will not possess Me corporeally, but you shall enjoy all that is in Me — righteousness, and all the promises of God — by believing.” It was thus that these believing Jews, to whom Peter wrote, possessed the Lord: they had received this precious faith.

He wishes them, as is the custom, “Grace and peace,” adding, “through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” It is the knowledge of God and of Jesus, which is the center and the support of faith, that which nourishes it, and in which it is developed and divinely enlarged, and which guards it from the vain imaginings of seducers. But there is a living power with this knowledge — a divine power in that which God is to believers — as He is revealed in this knowledge to faith; and this divine power has given to us all that pertains to life and godliness. By the realising knowledge which we possess of Him who has called us, this divine power becomes available and efficacious for all that appertains to life and godliness — “the knowledge of him who hath called us by glory and by virtue.”

Thus we have here, the call of God to pursue glory as our object, gaining the victory by virtue — spiritual courage — over all the enemies that we find in our path. It is not a law given to a people already gathered together, but glory proposed in order to be reached by spiritual energy. Moreover we have divine power acting according to its own efficacy, for the life of God in us, and for godliness.

How precious it is to know that faith can use this divine power, realised in the life of the soul, directing it towards glory as its end! What a safeguard from the efforts of the enemy, if we are really established in the consciousness of this divine power acting on our behalf in grace! The heart is led to make glory its object; and virtue, the strength of spiritual life, is developed on the way to it. Divine power has given us all needed.

Now, in connection with these two things — namely, with glory and with the energy of life — very great and precious promises are given us; for all the promises in Christ are developed either in the glory, or in the life which leads to it. By means of these promises, we are made partakers of the divine nature; for this divine power, which is realised in life and godliness, is connected with these great and precious promises that relate either to the glory, or to virtue in the life that leads to it — that is to say, it is divine power which develops itself, in realising the glory and heavenly walk which characterises it in its own nature. We are thus made morally partakers of the divine nature, by divine power acting in us and fixing the soul on what is divinely revealed. Precious truth! Privilege so exalted! and which renders us capable of enjoying God Himself, as well as all good.

By the same action of this divine power, we escape the corruption that is in the world through lust; for the divine power delivers us from it. Not only do we not yield to it, but we are occupied elsewhere, and the action of the enemy upon the flesh is kept off; the desires from which one could not cleanse oneself are removed; the corrupt relationship of the heart with its object ceases. It is a real deliverance; we have the mastery over ourselves in this respect; we are set free from sin.

But it is not enough to have escaped by faith from even the inward dominion of the desires of the flesh; we must add to faith — to that faith which realizes divine power, and the glory of Christ that shall be revealed — we must add to faith, virtue. This is the first thing. It is, as we have said, the moral courage which overcomes difficulties, and governs the heart by curbing all action of the old nature. It is an energy by which the heart is master of itself, and is able to choose the good, and to cast aside the evil, as a thing conquered and unworthy of oneself. This indeed is grace; but the apostle is here speaking of the thing itself, as it is realised in the heart, and not of its source. I have said that this is the first thing; because, practically,

this self-government — this virtue, this moral energy — is deliverance from evil, and renders communion with God possible. It is the one thing which gives reality to all the rest, for without virtue we are not really with God. Can divine power develop itself in the laxity of the flesh? And if we are not really with God — if the new nature is not acting — knowledge is but the puffing up of the flesh; patience but a natural quality, or else hypocrisy; and so on with the rest. But where there is this virtue, it is very precious to add knowledge to it. We have then divine wisdom and intelligence to guide our walk: the heart is enlarged, sanctified, spiritually developed, by a more complete and profound acquaintance with God, who acts in the heart and is reflected in the walk. We are guarded from more errors — we are more humble, more sober-minded: we know better where our treasure is, and what it is, and that everything else is but vanity and a hindrance. It is therefore a true knowledge of God that is here meant.

Thus walking in the knowledge of God, the flesh, the will, the desires, are bridled; all their practical power diminishes, and they disappear as habits of the soul; they are not fed. We are moderate; there is self-restraint; we do not give way to our desires; temperance is added to knowledge. The apostle is not speaking of the walk, but of the state of the heart in the walk. Still, being thus governed, and the will bridled, one bears patiently with others; and the circumstances that must be passed through are, in all respects, born according to the will of God, be they what they may. We add patience to temperance. The heart, the spiritual life, is then free to enjoy its true objects — a principle of deep importance in the christian life. When the flesh is at work in one way or another (even if its action is purely inward), if there is anything whatever that the conscience ought to be exercised about, the soul cannot be in the enjoyment of communion with God in the light, because the effect of the light is then to bring the conscience into exercise. But when the conscience has nothing that is not already judged in the light, the new man is in action with regard to God, whether in realising the joy of His presence or in glorifying Him in a life characterised by godliness. We enjoy communion with God; we walk with God; we add to patience godliness.

The heart being thus in communion with God, affection flows out freely towards those who are dear to Him, and who, sharing the same nature,



necessarily draw out the affections of the spiritual heart: brotherly love is developed.

There is another principle, which crowns and governs and gives character to all others: it is charity, love properly so called. This, in its root, is the nature of God Himself, the source and perfection of every other quality that adorns christian life. The distinction between love and brotherly love is of deep importance; the former is indeed, as we have just said, the source whence the latter flows; but as this brotherly love exists in mortal men, it may be mingled in its exercise with sentiments that are merely human, with individual affection, with the effect of personal attractions, or that of habit, of suitability in natural character. Nothing is sweeter than brotherly affections; their maintenance is of the highest importance in the assembly; but they may degenerate, as they may grow cool; and if love, if God, does not hold the chief place, they may displace Him — set Him aside — shut Him out. Divine love, which is the very nature of God, directs, rules, and gives character to brotherly love; otherwise it is that which pleases us — that is, our own heart — that governs us. If divine love governs me, I love all my brethren; I love them because they belong to Christ; there is no partiality. I shall have greater enjoyment in a spiritual brother; but I shall occupy myself about my weak brother with a love that rises above his weakness and has tender consideration for it. I shall concern myself with my brother's sin, from love to God, in order to restore my brother, rebuking him, if needful; nor, if divine love be in exercise, can brotherly love, or its name, be associated with disobedience. In a word, God will have His place in all my relationships. To exact brotherly love in such a manner as to shut out the requirements of that which God is, and of His claims upon us, is to shut out God in the most plausible way, in order to gratify our own hearts. Divine love then, which acts according to the nature, character, and will of God, is that which ought to direct and characterise our whole christian walk, and have authority over every movement of our hearts. Without this, all that brotherly love can do is to substitute man for God. Divine love is the bond of perfectness, for it is God, who is love, working in us and making Himself the governing object of all that passes in the heart.

Now, if these things are in us, the knowledge of Jesus will not be barren in our hearts. But if, on the contrary, they are wanting, we are blind; we

cannot see far into the things of God; our view is contracted; it is limited by the narrowness of a heart governed by its own will, and turned aside by its own lusts. We forget that we have been cleansed from our old sins; we lose sight of the position Christianity has given us. This state of things is not the loss of assurance, but the forgetfulness of the true christian profession into which we are brought — purity in contrast with the ways of the world.

Therefore we ought to use diligence, in order to have the consciousness of our election fresh and strong, so as to walk in spiritual liberty. Thus doing, we shall not stumble; and thus an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom will be our portion. Here, as throughout, we see that the apostle's mind is occupied with the government of God, applying it to His dealing with believers, in reference to their conduct and its practical consequences. He is not speaking in an absolute way of pardon and salvation, but of the kingdom — of the manifestation of His power who judges righteously — whose sceptre is a sceptre of righteousness. Walking in the ways of God, we have part in that kingdom, entering into it with assurance, without difficulty, without that hesitation of soul which is experienced by those who grieve the Holy Ghost, and get a bad conscience, and allow themselves in things that do not accord with the character of the kingdom, or who show by their negligence that their heart is not in it. If on the contrary the heart cleaves to the kingdom, and our ways are suitable to it, our conscience is in unison with its glory. The way is open before us: we see into the distance, and we go forward, having no impediments in our way. Nothing turns us aside as we walk in the path that leads to the kingdom, occupied with things suitable to it. God has no controversy with one who walks thus. The entrance into the kingdom is widely opened to him according to the ways of God in government.

The apostle desires, therefore, to remind them of these things, although they knew them, purposing, so long as he was in his earthly tabernacle, to stir up their pure hearts to keep them in remembrance; for soon would he have laid aside his earthly vessel, as the Lord had told him, and by thus writing to them, he took care that they should always bear them in mind.

It is very plain that he was not expecting other apostles to be raised up, nor an ecclesiastical succession to take their place as guardians of the faith,

or as possessing sufficient authority to be a foundation for the faith of believers. He was to provide for this himself, in order that, on his removal, they might find something on his part that would remind the faithful of the instructions he had given them. For this purpose he wrote his epistle.

The divine importance and certainty of that which he taught were worthy of this labor. We have not, says the apostle, followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of His majesty.

The apostle is speaking, as his words plainly show, of the transfiguration. I notice it here, in order to mark more evidently that in his thoughts of the Lord's coming he does not go beyond His appearing in glory. For the moment He was hidden from those who trusted in Him: this was a great trial of their faith, for the Jews were accustomed, as we know, to look for a visible and glorious Messiah. To believe without seeing was the lesson they had to learn; and it was a magnificent support to their faith, this fact, that the apostle, who taught them, had, with his two companions, seen, with their own eyes, the glory of Christ manifested — had seen it displayed before them, together with that of former saints who share His kingdom. At that time Jesus received, in testimony from God the Father, honor and glory; a voice addressing Him from the excellent glory — from the cloud, which was to a Jew the well-known dwelling-place of Jehovah the Most High God — owning Him as His well-beloved Son; a voice which the three apostles also heard (even as they saw His glory), when they were with Him on the holy mount.\*

[\* In Luke 9 the higher part of the blessing is brought before us. They feared when they entered into the cloud. God had talked with Moses from the cloud face to face, but here they enter into it. The heavenly and eternal character, what is perpetual as moral, is much more brought out in Luke.]

We see that it is here the glory of the kingdom, and not the dwelling in the Father's house for ever with the Lord, which occupies the apostle. It is a manifestation to men living on the earth; it is the power of the Lord, the glory which He receives from God the Father as the Messiah, acknowledged to be His Son, and crowned with glory and honor before the eyes of the world. It is into the everlasting kingdom that the apostle wishes them to have an enlarged entrance. It is the power and glory that Christ received from God, which the apostle saw, and to which he bears

testimony. We shall indeed have this glory, but it is not our portion, properly so called: for this is within the house, to be the bride of the Lamb, and it does not display itself to the world. With regard however to the assembly the two things cannot be separated; if we are the bride, we shall assuredly participate in the glory of the kingdom.\* To the Jew, who was accustomed to look for this glory (whatever might be his idea respecting it), the fact of the apostle's having seen it was of inestimable importance. It was the heavenly glory of the kingdom, as it shall be manifested to the world; a glory that shall be seen when the Lord returns in power (compare Mark 9:1). It is a communicated glory which comes from the excellent glory. Moreover the testimony of the prophets relates to the manifested glory; they spoke of the kingdom and glory, and the brightness of the transfiguration was a splendid confirmation of their words. We have, says the apostle, the words of the prophets confirmed. Those words proclaimed indeed the glory of the kingdom which was to come, and the judgment of the world, which was to make way for its establishment on earth. This announcement was a light in the darkness of our world, truly a dark place, that had no other light than the testimony which God had given, through the prophets, of that which shall happen to it, and of the future kingdom whose light shall finally dispel the darkness of separation from God in which the world lies. Prophecy was a light that shone during the darkness of the night; but there was another light for those that watched.

[\* Compare Luke 12, where the joy within the house is connected with watching; the inheritance with service.]

For the remnant of the Jews, the Sun of righteousness should rise with healing in His wings; the wicked should be trodden as ashes under the feet of the righteous. The Christian, instructed in his own privileges, knows the Lord in a different way from this, although he believes in those solemn truths. He watches during the night, which is already far spent. He sees in his heart, by faith,\* the dawn of day, and the rising of the bright star of the morning. He knows the Lord as they know Him who believe in Him before He is manifested, as coming for the pure heavenly joy of His own before the brightness of the day shines forth. They who watch see the dawn of day; they see the morning star. Thus we have our portion in Christ not only in the day, and as the prophets spoke of Him, which all relates to the

earth, although the blessing comes from on high; we have the secret of Christ and of our union with Him, and of His coming to receive us to Himself as the morning star, before the day comes. We are His during the night; we shall be with Him in the truth of that heavenly bond which unites us to Him, as set apart for Himself while the world does not see Him. We shall be gathered to Him, before the world sees Him, that we may enjoy Himself, and in order that the world may see us with Him when He appears.

[\* This is the construction of the sentence: “We have also the prophetic word confirmed, in giving heed to which ye do well (as to a light shining in a dark place), until the day shall dawn, and the morning star arise, in your hearts.”

The joy of our portion is, that we shall be with Himself, “for ever with the Lord.” Prophecy enlightens the Christian, and separates him from the world, by testimony to its judgment, and the glory of the coming kingdom. The testimony of the Spirit to the assembly does this, by the attraction of Christ Himself, the bright morning star — our portion while the world is still buried in sleep.

The bright morning star is Christ Himself, when (before the day, which will be produced by His appearing) He is ready to receive the assembly, that she may enter into His own peculiar joy. Thus it is said, “I am the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16). This is what He is for the assembly, as He is the root and offspring of David for Israel.

Consequently, as soon as He says “the morning star,” the Spirit, who dwells in the assembly and inspires her thoughts, and the bride, the assembly itself which waits for her Lord, say, “Come!” Thus, in Revelation 2:28, the faithful in Thyatira are promised by the Lord that He will give them the morning star; that is to say, joy with Himself in heaven. The kingdom and the power had been already promised them according to Christ’s own rights (v. 26, 27); but the assembly’s proper portion is Christ Himself. In addition to the declaration of the prophets, with regard to the kingdom, it is thus that the assembly expects Him.

The apostle goes on to warn the faithful, that the prophecies of scripture were not like the utterances of human will, and were not to be interpreted as though each had a separate solution — as though every prophecy were sufficient to itself for the explanation of its full meaning. They were all

parts of one whole, having one and the same object, even the kingdom of God; and each event was a preliminary step towards this object, and a link in the chain of God's government which led to it, impossible to be explained, unless the aim of the whole were apprehended — the revealed aim of the counsels of God in the glory of His Christ. For holy men, moved by the Holy Ghost, pronounced these oracles, one and the same Spirit directing and co-ordaining the whole for the development of the ways of God to the eye of faith, ways which would terminate in the establishment of that kingdom, the glory of which had appeared at the transfiguration.

Thus we have here (chap. 1) these three things: — Firstly, divine power for all that appertains to life and godliness, a declaration of infinite value, the pledge of our true liberty. Divine power acts in us, it gives to us all needed to enable us to walk in the christian life.

Secondly, there is the government of God, in connection with the faithfulness of the believer, in order that a wide and abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom may be granted us, and that we may not stumble. The great result of this government will be manifested in the establishment of the kingdom, the glory of which was seen on the holy mount by the three apostles.

But, thirdly, for the Christian there was something better than the kingdom, something to which the apostle merely alludes, for it was not the especial subject of the communications of the Holy Ghost to him as it was to the Apostle Paul, namely, Christ taking the assembly to Himself, a point not found either in the promises or the prophecies, but which forms the precious and inestimable joy and hope of the Christian taught of God.

This first chapter has thus taught us the divine aspect of the christian position, given to the apostle for the instruction, in the last days, of believers from among the circumcision. The next two chapters set before us, on the other hand, the two forms of evil that characterise the last days — the false and corrupt teaching of bad men, and the unbelief which denies the return of the Lord on the ground of the stability of the visible creation. The former really denies the Master who bought them. It is no question here as to the title of the Lord, nor of redemption. The simile is of a master who has purchased slaves at the market, and they disown and refuse to

obey him. Thus among the converted Jews there would be false teachers, who disowned the authority of Christ — His rights over them. Many would be led away by them; and as they bore the name of Christians, the way of truth would be brought into disrepute by their means; while in fact, by their covetousness and hypocritical words, they would make merchandise of Christians for their private gain, count them as mere instruments of it. But the resource of faith is always in God. Judgment would overtake them. The examples of the fallen angels, of Noah and the deluge, of Lot and Sodom, proved that the Lord knew how to deliver the righteous out of their trials, and to reserve the unrighteous for the day of judgment.

That which would characterise this class of evildoers would be the unbridled license of their conduct. They would indulge their carnal lusts, and despise all authority in a way that angels would not dare to do. Still they would call themselves Christians and associate with Christians in their love-feasts, deceiving their own hearts, addicting themselves continually to evil, promising liberty to others, but themselves the slaves of corruption.

Now, to be thus re-entangled in evil, after having escaped it through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior, was worse than if they had never known anything of the way of truth. But it was according to the true proverb — The dog had returned to his own vomit, and the sow that had been washed, to her wallowing in the mire. They were apostates therefore; but here the Spirit of God does not so much point out the apostasy as the evil, because the government of God is still in view. In Jude the apostasy is the prominent thing. Peter tells us that the angels sinned; Jude, that they kept not their first estate. But God will judge the wicked.

In the last chapter, as we have said, it is materialism: trust in the stability of that which can be seen, in contrast with trust in the word of God which teaches us to look for the coming of Jesus, the return of the Lord. They judge by their senses. There is, say they, no appearance of change. This is not the case. To the eye of man it is indeed true that there is none. But these unbelievers are wilfully ignorant of the fact that the world has been already judged once; that the waters, out of which by the mighty word of God the earth came, had for the moment swallowed it up again, all

perishing except those whom God preserved in the ark. And by the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. It is not that the Lord is slack concerning the promise of His return, but that He is still exercising grace, not wishing any to perish, but that all should come to repentance. And a thousand years are to Him but as a day, and a day as a thousand years. But the day of the Lord shall come, in which all things will pass away, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and all that is on the earth will be consumed. Solemn consideration for the children of God, to maintain them in complete separation from evil, and from all that is seen, looking for and hastening the day in which the heavens shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat! Everything on which the hopes of the flesh are founded shall disappear for ever.

Nevertheless, there shall be new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness shall dwell. It is not here said, "shall reign," which would be the thousand years of the Lord's dominion; here it is the eternal state, in which the government, that has brought all things into order, will terminate, and unhindered blessing will flow from God, the kingdom being given up to God the Father.

It is in following out the ways of God in government that the apostle carries them on to the eternal state, in which the promise will be finally accomplished. The millennium itself was the restitution, of which the prophets had spoken; and, morally, the heavens and the earth had been changed by the imprisonment of Satan and the reign of Christ (see Isaiah 65:17, 18, Jerusalem having been made a rejoicing); and the heavens indeed entirely cleared by power, never to be defiled by Satan again, the saints on high too in their eternal state, the earth delivered, but not yet finally freed. But, materially, the dissolution of the elements was necessary for the renewal of all things.

It will be observed, that the Spirit does not speak here of the coming of Christ, except to say that it will be scoffed at in the last days. He speaks of the day of God, in contrast with the trust of unbelievers in the stability of the material things of creation, which depends, as the apostle shows, on the word of God. And in that day everything on which unbelievers rested and will rest shall be dissolved and pass away. This will not be at the



commencement of the day, but at its close; and here we are free to reckon this day, according to the apostle's word, as a thousand years, or whatever length of period the Lord shall see fit.

So solemn a dissolution of all that the flesh rests upon should lead us so to walk as to be found of the Lord, when He comes to introduce that day, in peace and blameless; accounting that the apparent delay is only the Lord's grace, exercised for the salvation of souls. We may well wait, if God makes use of this time to rescue souls from judgment, by bringing them to the knowledge of Himself, and saving them with an everlasting salvation. This, the apostle says, had been taught by Paul, who wrote to them (the Hebrew believers) of these things, as he did also in his other epistles.

It is interesting to see that Peter, who had been openly rebuked before all by Paul, introduces him here with entire affection. He notices that Paul's epistles contained an exalted doctrine, which they who were unstable, and not taught of God, perverted. For Peter in fact does not follow Paul in the field on which the latter had entered. This however does not prevent his speaking of Paul's writings as forming a part of the scriptures; "as also the other scriptures," he says. This is an important testimony; which moreover gives the same character to the writings of one who is able to bestow this title on the writings of another.

Let Christians then be watchful, and not allow themselves to be seduced by the errors of the wicked, but strive to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen!

# 1 JOHN

The epistle of John has a peculiar character. It is eternal life manifested in Jesus, and imparted to us — the life which was with the Father, and which is in the Son. It is in this life that believers enjoy the communion of the Father, that they are in relationship with the Father by the Spirit of adoption, and that they have fellowship with the Father and the Son. God's own character is that which tests it; because it proceeds from Himself.

The first chapter establishes these two latter points: namely, communion with the Father and the Son, and that this communion must be according to the essential character of God. The name of Father is that which gives character to the second chapter. Afterwards it is that which God is, which tests the reality of imparted life.

The epistles of Paul, although speaking of this life, are in general occupied with setting before Christians the truth respecting the means of standing in the presence of God justified and accepted. The epistle of John, that is to say, his first, shows us the life that comes from God by Jesus Christ. John sets God before us, the Father revealed in the Son, and eternal life in Him. Paul sets us before God accepted in Christ. I speak of what characterises them. Each respectively touches on the other point.

Now, this life is so precious, manifested as it is in the Person of Jesus, that the epistle now before us has in this respect quite a peculiar charm. When I, too, turn my eyes to Jesus, when I contemplate all His obedience, His purity, His grace, His tenderness, His patience, His devotedness, His holiness, His love, His entire freedom from all self-seeking, I can say, That is my life.

This is immeasurable grace. It may be that it is obscured in me; but it is none the less true, that that is my life. Oh how do I enjoy it thus seen! How I bless God for it! What rest to the soul! What pure joy to the heart! At the same time Jesus Himself is the object of my affections; and all my affections are formed on that holy object.\*

[\* And this is morally very important; while it is in Him, not in myself, that I rejoice and delight.]

But we must turn to our epistle. There were many pretensions to new light, to clearer views. It was said that Christianity was very good as an elementary thing; but that it was grown old, and that there was a new light which went far beyond that twilight truth.

The Person of our Lord, the true manifestation of the divine life itself, dissipated all those proud pretensions, those exaltations of the human mind under the influence of the enemy, which did but obscure the truth, and lead the mind of men back into the darkness whence they themselves proceeded.

That which was from the beginning (of Christianity; that is, in the Person of Christ), that which they had heard, had seen with their own eyes, had contemplated, had touched with their own hands, of the Word of life — that was it which the apostle declared. For the life itself had been manifested. That life which was with the Father had been manifested to the disciples. Could there be anything more perfect, more excellent, any development more admirable in the eyes of God, than Christ Himself, than that Life which was with the Father, manifested in all its perfection in the Person of the Son? As soon as the Person of the Son is the object of our faith, we feel that perfection must have been at the beginning.

The Person then of the Son, the eternal life manifested in the flesh, is our subject in this epistle.

Grace is consequently to be remarked here in that which regards life; while Paul presents it in connection with justification. The law promised life upon obedience; but life came in the Person of Jesus, in all its own divine perfection, in its human manifestations. Oh how precious is the truth that this life, such as it was with the Father, such as it was in Jesus, is given to us! In what relationships it sets us, by the power of the Holy Ghost, with the Father and with the Son Himself! And this is what the Spirit here first sets before us. And observe, how it is all grace here. Farther on, indeed, He tests all pretensions to the possession of fellowship with God, by displaying God's own character; a character from which He can never deviate. But, before entering on this, He presents the Savior Himself, and

communion with the Father and the Son by this means, without question and without modification. This is our position and our eternal joy.

The apostle had seen that life, had touched it with his own hands; and he wrote to others, proclaiming this, in order that they also should have communion with him in the knowledge of the life which had been thus manifested.\* Now, inasmuch as that life was the Son, it could not be known without knowing the Son; that is, that which He was, entering into His thoughts, His feelings: otherwise He is not really known. It was thus they had communion with Him — with the Son. Precious fact! to enter into the thoughts (all the thoughts), and into the feelings, of the Son of God come down in grace: to do this in fellowship with Him; that is to say, not only knowing them, but sharing these thoughts and feelings with Him. In effect, it is the life.

[\* The life has been manifested. Therefore we have no longer to seek for it, to grope after it in the darkness, to explore at random the indefinite, or the obscurity of our own hearts, in order to find it, to labor fruitlessly under the law, in order to obtain it. We behold it: it is revealed, it is here, in Jesus Christ. He who possesses Christ possesses that life.]

But we cannot have the Son without having the Father. He who had seen Him had seen the Father; and consequently he who had communion with the Son had communion with the Father; for their thoughts and feelings were all one. He is in the Father, and the Father in Him. We have fellowship therefore with the Father. And this is true also, when we look at it in another aspect. We know that the Father has entire delight in the Son. Now He has given us, by revealing the Son, to take our delight in Him also, feeble as we are. I know, when I am delighting in Jesus — in His obedience, His love to His Father, to us, His single eye and purely devoted heart — I have the same feelings, the same thoughts, as the Father Himself. In that the Father delights, cannot but delight, in Him in whom I now delight, I have communion with the Father. So with the Son in the knowledge of the Father. All this flows, whether in the one or the other point of view, from the Person of the Son. Herein our joy is full. What can we have more than the Father and the Son? What more perfect happiness than community of thoughts, feelings, joys, and communion, with the Father and the Son, deriving all our joy from themselves? And if it seem difficult to believe, let us remember that, in truth, it cannot be otherwise: for, in the life of Christ, the Holy Ghost is the source of my thoughts,

feelings, communion, and He cannot give thoughts different from those of the Father and the Son. They must be in their nature the same. To say that they are adoring thoughts is in the very nature of things, and only makes them more precious. To say that they are feeble and often hindered, while the Father and the Son are divine and perfect, is, if true, to say the Father and the Son are God, are divine, and we feeble creatures. That surely none will deny. But if the blessed Spirit be the source, they must be the same as to nature and fact.

This is our christian position then, here below in time, through the knowledge of the Son of God; as the apostle says, “These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.”

But He who was the life which came from the Father, has brought us the knowledge of God.\* The apostle had heard from His lips that which God was — knowledge of priceless value, but which searches the heart. And this also the apostle, on the Lord’s part, announces to believers. This then is the message which they had heard from Him, namely, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness. With regard to Christ, He spoke that which He knew, and bore testimony to that which He had seen. No one had been in heaven, save He who came down from thence. No one had seen God. The Only-begotten, who is in the bosom of the Father, He had declared Him. No one had seen the Father, save He who was of God; He had seen the Father. Thus He could, of His own and perfect knowledge, reveal Him.\*\* Now God was light, perfect purity, which makes manifest at the same time all that is pure, and all that is not so. To have communion with light, one must oneself be light, be of its nature, and fit to be seen in the perfect light. It can only be linked with that which is of itself. If there is anything else that mingles with it, light is no longer light. It is absolute in its nature, so as to exclude all that is not itself.

[\* It will be found that, when grace to us is spoken of in John’s writings, he speaks of the Father and the Son; when the nature of God or our responsibility, he says God. John 3 and 1 John 4 may seem exceptions, but are not. It is what God is as such, not personal action and relationship in grace.]

[\*\* He who had seen Him had seen the Father; but here the apostle speaks of a message and the revelation of His nature.]

Therefore, if we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not practice truth: our life is a perpetual lie.

But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we (believers) have communion with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. These are the great principles, the great features of christian position. We are in the presence of God without a veil. It is a real thing, a matter of life and of walk. It is not the same thing as walking according to the light; but it is in the light. That is to say, that this walk is before the eyes of God, enlightened by the full revelation of what He is. It is not that there is no sin in us; but, walking in the light, the will and the conscience being in the light as God is in it, everything is judged that does not answer to it. We live and walk morally in the sense that God is present, and as knowing Him. We walk thus in the light. The moral rule of our will is God Himself, God known. The thoughts that sway the heart come from Himself and are formed upon the revelation of Himself. The apostle puts these things always in an abstract way: thus he says, "he cannot sin, because he is born of God"; and that maintains the moral rule of this life; it is its nature; it is the truth, inasmuch as the man is born of God. We cannot have any other measure of it: any other would be false. It does not follow, alas! that we are always consistent; but we are inconsistent if we are not in this state; we are not walking according to the nature that we possess; we are out of our true condition according to that nature.

Moreover, walking in the light, as God is in the light, believers have communion with each other. The world is selfish. The flesh, the passions, seek their own gratification; but, if I walk in the light, self has no place there. I can enjoy the light, and all I seek in it, with another, and there is no jealousy. If another possess a carnal thing, I am deprived of it. In the light we have fellow-possession of that which He gives us, and we enjoy it the more by sharing it together. This is a touchstone to all that is of the flesh. As much as one is in the light, so much will we have fellow-enjoyment with another who is in it. The apostle, as we have said, states this in an abstract and absolute way. This is the truest way to know the thing itself. The rest is only a question of realisation.

In the third place, the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

To walk in the light as God is in it, to have fellowship with one another, to be cleansed from all sin by the blood; these are the three parts of christian position. We feel the need there is of the last; for, while walking in the light as God is in the light, with (blessed be God) a perfect revelation to us of Himself, with a nature that knows Him, that is capable of seeing Him spiritually, as the eye is made to appreciate light (for we participate in the divine nature), we cannot say that we have no sin. The light itself would contradict us. But we can say that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us perfectly from all sin.\* Through the Spirit we enjoy the light together: it is the common joy of our hearts before God, and well-pleasing to Him; a testimony to our common participation in the divine nature which is love also. And our conscience is no hindrance, because we know the value of the blood. We have no conscience of sin upon us before God, though we know it is in us; but we have the conscience of being clean from it by the blood. But the same light which shows us this, prevents our saying (if we are in it) that we have no sin in us; we should deceive ourselves if we said so; and the truth would not be in us; for if the truth were in us, if that revelation of the divine nature, which is light, Christ our life, were in us, the sin that is in us would be judged by the light itself. If it be not judged, this light — the truth which speaks of things as they are — is not in us.

[\* It is not said “has” nor “will.” It does not refer to time, but to its efficacy. As I might say such a medicine cures the ague. It is its efficacy.]

If, on the other hand, we have even committed sin and all, being judged according to the light, is confessed (so that the will no longer takes part in it, the pride of that will being broken down), He is faithful and just to forgive us, and to cleanse us from all iniquity. If we say that we have not sinned\* (as a general truth), it shows not only that the truth is not in us, but we make God a liar; His word is not in us, for He says that all have sinned. There are the three things: we lie; the truth is not in us; we make God a liar. It is this fellowship with God in the light, which in practical daily christian life, inseparably connects forgiveness, and the present sense of it by faith, and purity of heart.

[\* When speaking of sin, the apostle speaks in the present tense, “we have”; when speaking of sinning, he speaks in the past. He does not take for granted we are going on doing it. It has been a question whether the apostle speaks of first coming to the Lord, or subsequent failures. I answer, he speaks in an abstract and absolute way: confession brings through grace, forgiveness. If it

is our first coming to God, it is forgiveness; it is in the full and absolute sense. I am forgiven with God: He remembers my sins no more. If it is subsequent failure, honesty of heart always confesses, then it is forgiveness as regards the government of God, and the present condition and relationship of my soul with Him. But the apostle, as everywhere, speaks absolutely and of the principle.]

Thus we see the christian position (v. 7); and then the things which, in three different ways, are opposed to the truth — to communion with God in life.

The apostle wrote that which relates to the communion with the Father and the Son, in order that their joy might be full.

That which he wrote according to the revelation of the nature of God, which he had received from Him who was the life from heaven, was in order that they should not sin. But to say this is to suppose that they might sin. Not that it is necessary they should do so; for the presence of sin in the flesh by no means obliges us to walk after the flesh. But if it should take place, there is provision made by grace, in order that grace may act, and that we may be neither condemned, nor brought again under the law.

We have an Advocate with the Father, One who carries on our cause for us on high. Now this is not in order to obtain righteousness, nor again to wash our sins away. All that has been done. Divine righteousness has placed us in the light, even as God Himself is in the light. But communion is interrupted, if even levity of thought finds place in our heart; for it is of the flesh, and the flesh has no communion with God. When communion is interrupted, when we have sinned (not when we have repented; for it is His intercession that leads to repentance), Christ intercedes for us. Righteousness is always present — our righteousness — "Jesus Christ the Righteous." Therefore, neither the righteousness nor the value of the propitiation for sin being changed, grace acts (one may say, acts necessarily) in virtue of that righteousness, and of that blood which is before God — acts, on the intercession of Christ who never forgets us, in order to bring us back to communion by means of repentance. Thus, while yet on earth, before Peter had committed the sin, He prayed for him; at the given moment He looks on him, and Peter repents and weeps bitterly for



his offense. Afterwards the Lord does all that is necessary to make Peter judge the root itself of the sin; but all is grace.

It is the same in our case. Divine righteousness abides — the immutable foundation of our relationships with God, established on the blood of Christ. When communion, which exists only in the light, is interrupted, the intercession of Christ, available by virtue of His blood (for propitiation for the sin has also been made), restores the soul that it may still again enjoy communion with God according to the light, into which righteousness has introduced it.\* This propitiation is made for the whole world, not for the Jews only, nor to the exclusion of any one at all; but for the whole world, God in His moral nature having been fully glorified by the death of Christ.

[\* Here the subject is communion, and hence actual failure is spoken of; in the Hebrews, we have seen, it is access to God and we are “perfected for ever,” and priesthood is for mercy and help, not for sins, save the great act of atonement.]

These three capital points — or, if you will, two capital points, and the third, namely, advocacy, which is supplementary — form the introduction, the doctrine of the epistle. All the rest is an experimental application of that which this part contains: namely, first (life being given), communion with the Father and the Son; second, the nature of God, light, which manifests the falsehood of all pretension to communion with the light if the walk be in darkness; and third, seeing that sin is in us and that we may fail although we are cleansed before God so as to enjoy the light, the advocacy which Jesus Christ the righteous can always exercise before God, on the ground of the righteousness which is ever in His presence, and the blood which is shed for our sins, in order to restore our communion, when we have lost it by our guilty negligence.

The Spirit now proceeds to develop the characteristics of this divine life.

Now we are sanctified unto the obedience of Jesus Christ; that is to say, to obey on the same principles as those on which He obeyed; where His Father’s will was the motive as well as the rule of action. It is the obedience of a life to which it was meat and drink to do the will of God: not as under the law, in order to obtain life. The life of Jesus Christ was a life of obedience, in which He enjoyed the love of His Father perfectly, tested in all things and so proved perfect. His words, His commandments,

were the expression of that life; they direct that life in us, and ought to exercise all the authority over us of Him who pronounced them.

The law promised life to those who obeyed it. Christ is the life. This life has been imparted to us — to believers. Therefore, the words which were the expression of that life, in its perfection in Jesus, direct and guide it in us according to that perfection. Besides this, it has authority over us. His commandments are its expression. We have therefore to obey, and to walk as He walked — the two forms of practical life. It is not enough to walk well: we must obey, for there is authority. This is the essential principle of a right walk. On the other hand, the obedience of the Christian — as is evident by that of Christ Himself — is not that which we often think. We call a child obedient, who, having a will of his own, submits himself at once when the authority of the parent intervenes to prevent his accomplishing it. But Christ never obeyed in this way. He came to do the will of God. Obedience was His mode of being. His Father's will was the motive, and, with the love that was never separate from it, the only motive of His every act and every impulse. This is obedience properly called christian. It is a new life which delights in doing the will of Christ, acknowledging His entire authority over it. We reckon ourselves to be dead to everything else; we are alive unto God, we are not our own. We only know Christ inasmuch as we are living by His life; for the flesh does not know Him, and cannot understand His life.

Now, that life is obedience: therefore he who says, "I know him," and does not observe His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. It does not say here, "he deceives himself," for it is very possible that he is not self-deceived, as in the other case of fancied communion; for here the will is in action, and a man knows it, if he will confess it. But the reality is not there; he is a liar, and the truth in the knowledge of Jesus, which he professes, is not in him.

There are two remarks to be made here. First, that the apostle takes things always as they are in themselves in an abstract way, without the modifications that are occasioned by other things, in the midst of which, or in relation with which, the former are found. Second, that the chain of consequences which the apostle deduces is not that of outward reasoning, the force of which is consequently on the surface of the argument itself. He

reasons from a great inward principle, so that one does not see the force of the argument unless one knows the fact, and even the scope, of that principle; and, in particular, that which the life of God is in its nature, in its character, and in its action. But, without possessing it, we do not and cannot understand anything about it. There is, indeed, the authority of the apostle and of the word to tell us that the thing is so, and that is sufficient. But the links of his discourse will not be understood without the possession of the life which interprets what he says, and which is itself interpreted by that which he says.

I return to the text. “Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected.” It is in this way that we are conscious that we know Him. His “word” has rather a wider sense than His “commandments.” That is to say, while it equally implies obedience, the word is less outward. “Commandments” are here details of the divine life. His “word” contains its whole expression — the spirit of that life.\* It is universal and absolute. Now this life is the divine life manifested in Jesus, and which is imparted to us. Have we seen it in Christ? Do we doubt that this is love; that the love of God has been manifested in it? If then I keep His word; if the scope and meaning of the life which that word expresses is thus understood and realised, the love of God is perfect in me. The apostle, as we have seen, always speaks abstractedly. If in fact at any given moment I do not observe the word, in that point I do not realise His love; happy intercourse with God is interrupted. But so far as I am moved and governed absolutely by His word, His love is completely realised in me; for His word expresses what He is, and I am keeping it. This is the intelligent communion with His nature in its fullness, a nature in which I participate; so that I know that He is perfect love, I am filled with it, and this shows itself in my ways: for that word is the perfect expression of Himself.\*\*

[\* Fundamentally they are not different. This is affirmed in verse 7: “The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.” One might say with perfect truth that the commandment is the word of Christ; but I question if it could be said that the word is the commandment. And this makes one conscious of the difference. The contrast of verses 4 and 5 is remarkable, and has its source in the possession, and the intelligent and complete consciousness of the possession, of the divine life, according to the word, or its non-possession. He who says, I know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; for this truth is

only that which the word reveals. And if we live of the nature of which the word of Christ is the expression, and thus by the word know Him, we obey that word. In another aspect, if we are in possession of this life, partakers of the divine nature, the love of God is in us; we have the commandments of Christ, His word, the perfect love of God, a walk according to the walk of Christ, the communication of the life of Christ so that the commandment is true in Him and in us, the walk in the light, the love of our brother. How rich a chain of blessing! The pretensions here spoken of are — to know Christ, to abide in Him, to be in the light. The proof that the first pretension is justified is obedience. Then, if we abide in Christ (which we know by keeping His word), we ought to walk as He walked. That the last pretension is a true one is proved by love to our brother. In the second, the walk is maintained at all the height of the walk of Christ, as our duty: but this walk is not presented as a proof that we abide in Him, that we keep His word. Observe that it is not said, “We know that we believe” — this is not the question here; but, “We know that we are in Him.” — Let me add here, that the apostle never uses these proofs, as they are so commonly used, to say, “hereby we doubt.” It is quite certain from verses 12, 13, that he treats them as all forgiven or he would not have written, and as having the Spirit of adoption — even the youngest and feeblest. Others sought to make them doubt; and he writes that their hearts might be assured before God, that they might not be seduced into doubting, as if they had not a full Christ and a full Christianity — eternal life. It was the means of keeping and holding fast assurance when they had it, when they might have been shaken, not of obtaining it. They were forgiven, they were sons. When others would make them doubt, he writes that they may be fully assured that they have no reason to doubt.]

[\*\* This, I doubt not, is the true meaning of John 8:25. “In the principle of my nature, in my being, that which I am saying to you.” That which He said was essentially and completely that which He was. That which He was is that which He said. Now it is this life which is imparted to us; but it was the love of God among men and in man. And this life being our life, and the word of Christ giving us the knowledge of it, and this word being kept, His love is realised in us in all its extent.]

Consequently we know thus that we are in Him, for we realise that which He is in the communion of His nature. Now if we say that we abide in Him, it is evident, from what we have now seen in the instruction the apostle gives us, that we ought to walk as He walked. Our walk is the practical expression of our life; and this life is Christ known in His word. And since it is by His word, we who possess this life are under an intelligent responsibility to follow it; that is to say, to walk as He walked. For that word is the expression of His life.

Obedience then, as obedience, is thus far the moral characteristic of the life of Christ in us. But it is proof of that which, in Christianity, is inseparable

from the life of Christ in us: we are in Him (compare John 14:20). We know, not merely that we know Him, but that we are in Him. The enjoyment of the perfect love of God in the path of obedience, gives us by the Holy Ghost the consciousness that we are in Him. But if I am in Him, I cannot indeed be what He was, for He was without sin; but I ought to walk as He walked. Thus I know I am in Him. But if I make profession to abide in Him, my heart and spirit to be wholly there, I ought to walk as He walked. Obedience as a principle, and through keeping His word, and so the love of God perfected in me, knowing that I am in Him, are the formative principles and character of our life.

In verses 7 and 8 the two forms of the rule of this life are presented — forms which, moreover, answer to the two principles which we have just announced. It is not a new commandment which the apostle writes unto them but an old one; it is the word of Christ from the beginning. Were it not so, were it in this sense new, so much the worse for him who set it forth, for it would no longer be the expression of the perfect life of Christ Himself, but some other thing, or a falsification of that which Christ had set forth. This corresponds with the first principle, that is, obedience to commandments, to the commandments of Christ. What He said was the expression of what He was. He could command that they should love one another as He had loved them. Compare the Beatitudes.

In another sense it was a new commandment; for (by the power of the Spirit of Christ, being united to Him and drawing our life from Him) the Spirit of God manifested the effect of this life by revealing a glorified Christ in a new way. And now it was not only a commandment, but as the thing itself was true in Christ, it was so in His own as partakers of His nature and in Him; He also in them.

By this revelation, and by the presence of the Holy Ghost, the darkness disappeared,\* passed away, and in fact the true light shone. There will be no different light in heaven: only then the light will be publicly displayed in glory without a cloud.

[\* The force of the word is “the darkness is passing and the true light already shines.” There is much darkness yet in the world. As to the light, it has actually shone.]

Verse 9. The life, as in John 1:4, is now found to be the light of men, only the brighter for faith that Christ is gone, for it is through the rent veil it shines most brightly. We have had the pretension to know Him discussed — to be in Him; now that of being in the light, and this before the Spirit of God applies in detail the qualities of this life, as a proof of its existence, to the heart, in answer to seducers who sought to terrify them by new notions, as though Christians were not really in possession of life, and, with life, of the Father and the Son. The true light now shines. And this light is God; it is the divine nature; and, as that which was a means of judging the seducers themselves, he brings out another quality connected with our being in the light, that is with God fully revealed. Christ was it in the world. We are set to be it, in that we are born of God. And one who has this nature loves his brother; for is not God love? Has not Christ loved us, not being ashamed to call us brethren? Can I have His life and His nature, if I do not love the brethren? No. I am then walking in darkness; I have no light on my path. He who loves his brother dwells in the light; the nature of God acts in him; and he dwells in the bright spiritual intelligence of that life, in the presence and in the communion of God. If any one hates, it is evident that he has not divine light. With feelings according to a nature opposed to God, how can it be pretended that he is in the light?

Moreover, there is no occasion of stumbling in one who loves, for he walks according to divine light. There is nothing in him which causes another to stumble, for the revelation of the nature of God in grace will assuredly not do so: and it is this which is manifested in him who loves his brother.\*

[\* The reader may compare here, with much instruction, what is said in Ephesians 4:17 to 5:12, where these two names of God, the only ones used to reveal His nature, are also used to show our path and the true character of the Christian; only according to that which the Holy Ghost gives by Paul — the counsels and work of God in Christ. In John it is more the nature.]

This closes as an introductory statement the first part of the epistle. It contains in the former half, the privileged place of Christians, the message giving us the truth of our state here, and the provision for failure: that ends with chapter 2, verse 2; in the second half, the proofs the Christian has of the true possession of the privilege according to the message: obedience, and love of the brethren, knowing Christ, being in Christ, enjoying the perfect love of God, abiding in Him, being in the light, forming the condition which is thus proved.

Having established the two great principles, obedience and love, as proofs of the possession of the divine nature, of Christ known as life, and of our abiding in Him, the apostle goes on to address Christians personally and to show us the position, on the ground of grace, in three different degrees of ripeness. This parenthetical but most important address we will now consider.

He begins by calling all the Christians to whom he was writing, “children,” a term of affection in the loving and aged apostle. And as he writes to them (chap. 2:1) in order that they should not sin, so he writes also because all their sins were forgiven for Jesus’ name’s sake. This was the assured condition of all Christians: that which God had granted them in giving them faith, that they might glorify Him. He allows no doubt as to the fact of their being pardoned. He writes to them because they are so.

We next find three classes of Christians: fathers, young men, and babes. He addresses them each twice, fathers, young men, and babes (v. 13): fathers, in the first half of verse 14; young men from the second half, to the end of verse 17; and babes from verse 18 to the end of verse 27. In verse 28 he returns to all Christians under the name of “children.”

That which characterises fathers in Christ is that they have known Him who is from the beginning; that is, Christ. This is all that he has to say about them. All had resulted in that. He only repeats the same thing again, when, changing his form of expression, he begins anew with these three classes. The fathers have known Christ. This is the result of all christian experience. The flesh is judged, discerned, wherever it has mixed itself with Christ in our feelings; it is recognised, experimentally, as having no value; and, as the result of experience, Christ stands alone, free from all alloy. They have learnt to distinguish that which has only the appearance of good. They are not occupied with experience — that would be being occupied with self, with one’s own heart. All that has passed away; and Christ alone remains as our portion, unmingled with aught besides, even as He gave Himself to us. Moreover He is much better known; they have experienced what He is in so many details, whether of joy in communion with Him, or in the consciousness of weakness, or in the realisation of His faithfulness, of the riches of His grace, of His adaptation to our need, of His love, and in the revelation of His own fullness; so that they are able

now to say, “I know whom I have believed.” Attachment to Himself characterises them. Such is the character of “fathers” in Christ.

“Young men” are the second class. They are distinguished by spiritual strength in conflict: the energy of faith. They have overcome the wicked one. For he speaks of what their character is as in Christ. Conflict they have as such, but the strength of Christ manifested in them.

The third class is “babes.” These know the Father. We see here that the Spirit of adoption and of liberty characterises the youngest child in the faith of Christ, that it is not the result of progress. It is the commencement. We possess it because we are Christians; and it is ever the distinguishing mark of beginners. The others do not lose it, but other things distinguish them.

In again addressing these three classes of Christians, the apostle, as we have seen, has only to repeat that which he at first said with regard to the fathers. It is the result of christian life.

In the case of the young men he develops his idea and adds some exhortations. “Ye are strong,” he says, “and the word of God abideth in you” — an important characteristic. The word is the revelation of God, and the application of Christ, to the heart, so that we have thus the motives which form and govern it, and a testimony founded on the state of the heart, and on convictions which have a divine power in us. It is the sword of the Spirit in our relations with the world. We have been ourselves formed by those things to which we bear testimony in our relations with the world, and those things are in us according to the power of the word of God. The wicked one is thus overcome; for he has only the world to present to our lusts: and the word abiding in us keeps us in an altogether different sphere of thought in which a different nature is enlightened and strengthened by divine communications. The tendency of the young man is toward the world: the ardor of his nature, and the vigor of his age, tend to draw him away on that side. He has to guard against this by separating himself entirely from the world and the things that are in it; because if any one love the world, the love of the Father is not in him, for those things do not come from the Father. He has a world of His own, of which Christ is the center and glory. The lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — these are the things that are in the world and that



characterise it. There are really no other motives besides these in the world. Now these things are not of the Father.

The Father is the source of all that is according to His own heart — every grace, every spiritual gift, the glory, the heavenly holiness of all that was manifested in Christ Jesus, and that will be — all the world of glory to come, of which Christ is the center. And all this had only the cross for its portion here below. But the apostle is speaking here of the source; and assuredly the Father is not the source of those other things.

Now the world passes away; but he who does the will of God, he who, in going through this world, takes for his guide, not the desires of nature, but the will of God — a will which is according to His nature and which expresses it — such a one shall abide for ever according to the nature and the will that he has followed after.

We shall find that the world, and the Father with all that is of Him, the flesh and the Spirit, the Son and the devil, are put respectively in opposition. Things are spoken of in their source and moral nature, the principles that act in us and that characterise our existence and our position, and the two agents in good and evil that are opposed to each other, without (thanks be to God!) any uncertainty as to the issue of the conflict; for the weakness of Christ, in death, is stronger than the strength of Satan. He has no power against that which is perfect. Christ came that He might destroy the works of the devil.

To the babes the apostle speaks principally of the dangers to which they were exposed from seducers. He warns them with tender affection, reminding them at the same time that all the sources of intelligence and strength were open to them and belonged to them. "It is the last time"; not exactly the last days, but the season which had the final character that belonged to the dealings of God with this world. The Antichrist was to come, and already there were many antichrists: by this it might be known it was the last time. It was not merely sin, nor the transgression of the law; but, Christ having already been manifested, and being now absent and hidden from the world, there was a formal opposition to the especial revelation that had been made. It was not a vague and ignorant unbelief; it took a definite shape as having a will directed against Jesus. They might for instance believe all that a Jew believed, as it was revealed in the word;

but as to the testimony of God by Jesus Christ they opposed it. They would not own Him to be the Christ; they denied the Father and the Son. This, as to religious profession, is the true character of the Antichrist. He may indeed believe or pretend to believe, that there shall be a Christ; yea, set himself up to be it. But the two aspects of Christianity (that which, on the one hand, regards the accomplishment in the Person of Jesus of the promises made to the Jew; and, on the other hand, the heavenly and eternal blessings presented in the revelation of the Father by the Son), this the Antichrist does not accept. That which characterises him as Antichrist is that he denies the Father and the Son. To deny that Jesus is the Christ is indeed the Jewish disbelief that forms part of his character. That which gives him the character of Antichrist is that he denies the foundation of Christianity. He is a liar in that he denies Jesus to be the Christ; consequently it is the work of the father of lies. But all the unbelieving Jews had done as much without being Antichrist. To deny the Father and the Son characterises him.

But there is something more. These antichrists came out from among the Christians. There was apostasy. Not that they were really Christians, but they had been among the Christians and had come out from them. (How instructive for our days also is this epistle!) It was thus made manifest that they were not truly of the flock of Christ. All this had a tendency to shake the faith of babes in Christ. The apostle endeavors to strengthen them. There were two means of confirming their faith, which also inspired the apostle with confidence. Firstly, they had the unction of the Holy One; secondly, that which was from the beginning was the touchstone for all new doctrine, and they already possessed that which was from the beginning.

The indwelling of the Holy Ghost as an unction and spiritual intelligence in them, and the truth which they had received at the beginning — the perfect revelation of Christ — these were the safeguards against seducers and seductions. All heresy and all error and corruption will be found to strike at the first and divine revelation of the truth, if the unction of the Holy One is in us to judge them. Now this unction is the portion of even the youngest babes in Christ, and they ought to be encouraged to realise it, however tenderly they may be cared for as they were here by the apostle.

What important truths we discover here for ourselves! The last time already manifested, so that we have to be on our guard against seducers — persons moreover issuing from the bosom of Christianity.

The character of this Antichrist is that he denies the Father and the Son. Unbelief in its Jewish form is also again manifested — owning that there is a Christ, but denying that Jesus is He. Our security against these seductions is the unction from the Holy One — the Holy Ghost, but in especial connection with the holiness of God, which enables us to see clearly into the truth (another characteristic of the Spirit); and, secondly, that that abide in us which we have heard from the beginning. It is this evidently which we have in the written word. “Development,” note it well, is not that which we have from the beginning. By its very name it sins radically against the safeguard pointed out by the apostle. That which the church has taught, as development of the truth, whencesoever she may have received it, is not that which has been heard from the beginning.

There is another point indicated here by the apostle that ought to be noticed. People might pretend by giving God in a vague way the name of Father, that they possessed Him without the true possession of the Son, Jesus Christ. This cannot be. He who has not the Son has not the Father. It is by Him that the Father is revealed, in Him that the Father is known.

If the truth that we have received from the beginning abides in us, we abide in the Son and in the Father; for this truth is the revelation of the Son, and is revealed by the Son, who is the truth. It is living truth, if it abides in us; thus, by possessing it, we possess the Son, and in the Son, the Father also. We abide in it, and thereby we have eternal life (compare John 17:3).

Now the apostle had happy confidence that the unction which they had received of Him abode in them, so that they needed not to be taught of others, for this same unction taught them with respect to all things. It was the truth, for it was the Holy Ghost Himself acting in the word, which was the revelation of the truth of Jesus Himself, and there was no lie in it. Thus should they abide in Him according to that which it had taught them.

Observe also, here, that the effect of this teaching by the unction from on high is twofold with regard to the discernment of the truth. They knew that no lie was of the truth; possessing this truth from God, that which

was not it was a lie. They knew that this unction which taught them of all things was the truth, and that there was no lie in it. The unction taught them all things, that is to say, all the truth, as truth of God. Therefore that which was not it was a lie, and there was no lie in the unction. Thus the sheep hear the voice of the good Shepherd; if another calls them, it is not His voice, and that is enough. They fear it and flee from it, because they do not know it.

With verse 27 ends the second series of exhortations to the three classes. The apostle begins again with the whole body of Christians (v. 28). This verse appears to me to correspond with verse 8 of the second epistle, and with chapter 3 of the first epistle to the Corinthians.

The apostle, having ended his address to those who were all in the communion of the Father, applies the essential principles of the divine life, of the divine nature as manifested in Christ, to test those who claimed participation in it; not in order to make the believer doubt, but for the rejection of that which was false. I say, "not to make the believer doubt"; for the apostle speaks of his position, and of the position of those to whom he was writing, with the most perfect assurance (chap. 3:1, 2).<sup>\*</sup> He had spoken, in re-commencement at verse 28, of the appearing of Jesus. This introduces the Lord in the full revelation of His character, and gives rise to the scrutiny of the pretensions of those who called themselves by His name. There are two proofs which belong essentially to the divine life, and a third which is accessory as privilege: righteousness or obedience, and love, and the presence of the Holy Ghost.

[\* I have noticed, farther on, the striking way in which God and Christ are spoken of as one Being or Person, not as doctrine as to the two natures, but Christ is before the apostle's mind, and He is spoken of in the same sentence, now as God, now as appearing as man. Thus in chapter 2:28 He comes. In verse 29 the righteous man is born of Him, and we are children of God. But the world did not know Him. Now it is Christ on earth. Chapter 3:2 we are children of God, but in the same verse He appears and we are like Him. But what makes this yet more wonderful is that we are identified with Him too. We are called children because that is His title and relationship. The world does not know us, for it did not know Him. We know we shall be like Him when He appears. We are given the same place here and there. (Compare chap. 5:20).]

Righteousness is not in the flesh. If therefore it is really found in any one, he is born of Him, he derives his nature from God in Christ. We may

remark, that it is righteousness as it was manifested in Jesus; for it is because we know that He is righteous, that we know that “he who doeth righteousness is born of him.” It is the same nature demonstrated by the same fruits.

**CHAPTER 3.** Now to say that we are born of Him is to say that we are children of God.\* What a love is that which the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children!\* Therefore the world knows us not, because it knew Him not. The apostle returns here to His appearing and its effect on us. We are children of God: this is our present sure and known position; we are born of God. That which we shall be is not yet manifested; but we know that — associated with Jesus as we are in the same relationship with the Father, Himself being our life — we shall be like Him when He appears. For it is to this we are predestined, to see Him as He now is with the Father, from which the life came which was manifested in Him and imparted to us, and to appear in the same glory.

[\* See previous note.]

[\* John uses habitually the word “children,” not “sons,” as the more distinctly expressing that we are of the same family. We are as Christ before God and in the world, and so will be when He appears.]

Having then the hope of seeing Him as He is, and knowing that I shall be perfectly like Him when He appears, I seek to be as like Him now as possible, since I already possess this life — He being in me, my life.

This is the measure of our practical purification. We are not pure as He is pure; but we take Christ, as He is in heaven, for the pattern and measure of our purification, we purify ourselves according to His purity, knowing that we shall be perfectly like Him when He is manifested. Before marking the contrast between the principles of the divine life and of the enemy, he sets before us the true measure of purity (he will give that of love in a moment) for the children, inasmuch as they are partakers of His nature and have the same relationship with God.

There are two remarks to be made here. First, “hope in him” does not mean in the believer; but a hope that has Christ for its object. Second, it is striking to see the way in which the apostle appears to confound God and Christ together in this epistle; and uses the word “Him” to signify Christ, when he had just been speaking of God, and vice versa. We may see the

principle of this at the end of chapter 5: “We are in him that is true, that is to say] in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” In these few words we have the key to the epistle: Christ is the life. It is evidently the Son; but it is God Himself who is manifested, and the perfection of His nature, which is the source of life to us also, as that life was found in Christ as man. Thus I can speak of God and say, “Born of him”; but it is in Jesus that God was manifested, and from Him that I derive life; so that “Jesus Christ” and “God” are interchanged with each other. Thus “He shall appear” (chap. 2:28) is Christ, He is righteous; the righteous one “is born of him.” But in chapter 3:1 it is “born of God,” “children of God”; but the world did not know Him: here it is Christ on earth; and “when he shall appear,” it is again Christ and we purify ourselves “even as He is pure.” There are many other examples.

It is said of the believer, “he purifies himself”: this shows that he is not pure, as Christ is. He needed not to purify Himself. Accordingly it is not said, he is pure as Christ is pure (for in that case there would be no sin in us); but he purifies himself according to the purity of Christ as He is in heaven, having the same life as the life of Christ Himself.

Having set forth the positive aspect of christian purity, he goes on to speak of it in other points of view, as one of the characteristic proofs of the life of God in the soul.

He who commits sin (not transgresses the law,\* but) acts lawlessly. His conduct is without the restraint, without the rule of law. He acts without curb; for sin is the acting without the curb of law or restraint of another’s authority, acting from our own will. Christ came to do His Father’s will, not His own. But Christ was manifested that He might take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin; so that he who commits sin acts against the object of the manifestation of Christ, and in opposition to the nature of which, if Christ is our life, we are partakers. Therefore he who abides in Christ does not practice sin; he who sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. All depends, we see, on participation in the life and nature of Christ. Let us not then deceive ourselves. He who practices righteousness is righteous, as He is righteous: for, by partaking in the life of Christ, one is before God according to the perfection of Him who is there, the head and source of that life. But we are thus as Christ before God, because He

Himself is really our life. Our actual life is not the measure of our acceptance; it is Christ who is so. But Christ is our life, if we are accepted according to His excellence; for it is as living of His life that we participate in this.

- [\* In Romans 2:12, the word is used in contrast with law-breaking, or sinning under law. That is, the Greek word here used for what is translated “transgression of the law” is that used for sinning without law, in contrast with sinning under law, and being judged by it. I do not dissemble that this changing what is a definition of sin is a very serious thing,

But the judgment is more than negative. He who practices sin is of the devil, has morally the same nature as the devil; for he sinneth from the beginning: it is his original character as the devil. Now Christ was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil; how then can one who shares the character of this enemy of souls be with Christ?

On the other hand, he who is born of God does not practice sin. The reason is evident; he is made a partaker of the nature of God; he derives his life from Him. This principle of divine life is in him. The seed of God remains in him; he cannot sin, because he is born of God. This new nature had not in it the principle of sin, so as to commit it. How could it be that the divine nature should sin?

Having thus designated the two families, the family of God and that of the devil, the apostle adds the second mark, the absence of which is a proof that one is not of God. He had already spoken of righteousness; he adds the love of the brethren. For this is the message that they had received from Christ Himself, that they should love one another. In verse 12 he shows the connection between the two things: that hatred of a brother is fed by the sense one has that his works are good, and one’s own evil. Moreover we are not to wonder that the world hates us: for we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. If this love is an essential proof of being renewed, it is quite natural that it should not be found in the men of the world. But, this being the case, he who does not love his brother (solemn thought!), abides in death. In addition to this, he who does not love his brother is a murderer, and a murderer has not eternal life. There is the absence of the divine nature, death; but more, the activity of the old man in the opposite nature is there, he hates, and is in spirit the activity of death — a murderer.

Further, as in the case of righteousness and of purity, we have Christ as the measure of this love. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; we ought to lay down ours for the brethren. Now, if our brother has need, and we possess this world's good, but do not provide for his necessity, is that the divine love which made Christ lay down His life for us? It is by this real and practical love that we know we are in the truth, and that our heart is confirmed and assured before God. For if there is nothing on the conscience, we have confidence in His presence; but if our own heart condemns us, God knows yet more.

It is not here the means of being assured of our salvation, but of having confidence in the presence of God. We cannot have it with a bad conscience in the practical sense of the word, for God is always light and always holy.

We also receive all that we ask for, when we walk thus in love before Him, doing that which is pleasing in His sight; for thus walking in His presence with confidence, the heart and its desires respond to this blessed influence, being formed by the enjoyment of communion with Him in the light of His countenance. It is God who animates the heart; this life, and this divine nature, of which the epistle speaks, being in full activity and enlightened and moved by the divine presence in which it delights. Thus our requests are only for the accomplishment of desires that arise when this life, when our thoughts are filled with the presence of God and with the communication of His nature. And He lends His power to the fulfillment of these desires, of which He is the source, and which are formed in the heart by the revelation of Himself (compare John 15:7).

This is indeed the position of Christ Himself when here below: only that He was perfect in it (compare John 8:29; 11:42).

And here it is the commandment of God which He desires us to obey; namely, to believe on the name of His Son Jesus; and to love one another, as He gave us commandment.

Now he who keeps His commandments dwells in Him; and He dwells also in this obedient man. It will be asked whether God or Christ is here meant? The apostle, as we have seen, confounds them together in his thought. That is to say, the Holy Ghost unites them in our minds. We are in Him



who is true, that is, in His Son Jesus Christ. It is Christ, who is the presentation of God to men in life in man; and to the believer He is the communication of that life, so that God too dwells in him, in the revelation, in its divine excellence and perfection, of the nature which the believer shares in the power of the Holy Ghost who dwells in him, so that love is alike enjoyed and exercised.

But what marvelous grace to have received a life, a nature, by which we are enabled to enjoy God Himself, who dwells in us, and by which, since it is in Christ, we are in fact in the enjoyment of this communion, this relationship with God! He who has the Son has life; but God then dwells in him as the portion, as well as the source of this life; and he who has the Son has the Father.

What marvelous links of vital and living enjoyment through the communication of the divine nature of Him who is its source; and that according to its perfection in Christ! Such is the Christian according to grace. Therefore also he is obedient, because this life in the man Christ (and it is thus that it becomes ours) was obedience itself, the true relationship of man to God.

Practical righteousness, then, is a proof that we are born of Him who, in His nature, is its source. In presence also of the worlds hatred, we know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. Thus, having a good conscience, we have confidence in God, and we receive from Him whatsoever we ask, walking in obedience and in a way that is pleasing to Him. Thus walking, we dwell in Him\* and He in us.

[\* Here dwelling in Him comes first, because it is practical realisation in an obedient heart. His dwelling in us is then pursued apart as known by the Spirit given to us, to guard against being misled by evil spirits. In chapter 4:7, he resumes the indwelling in connection with the love of God.]

A third proof of our christian privileges arises here. The Spirit whom He has given us is the proof that He Himself dwells in us, the manifestation of the presence of God in us. He does not here add that we abide in Him, because the subject here is the manifestation of the presence of God. The presence of the Spirit demonstrates it. But in abiding in Him there is as we shall see farther on, the enjoyment of that which He is, and consequently moral communion with His nature. He who obeys enjoys this also, as we

have seen. Here the presence of the Holy Ghost in us is spoken of as demonstration of one part only of this truth, namely, that God is in us. But the presence of God in us according to grace, and according to the power of the Spirit, involves also communion with that nature; we dwell also in Him from whom we derive this grace, and all the spiritual forms of that nature, in communion and practical life. It is in verses 12 and 16 of chapter 4 that our apostle speaks of this.

Practical righteousness or obedience, the love of the brethren, the manifestation of the Spirit of God, are the proofs of our relationship to God. He who obeys the Lord's commandments in practical righteousness dwells in Him, and He in him. The Spirit given is the proof that He dwells in us.

Now, to make use of this last proof, caution was required, for many false prophets would assume, and even in the time of the apostle had already assumed, the semblance of having received communications from the Spirit of God, and insinuated themselves among the Christians (chap. 4). It was necessary therefore to put them on their guard, by giving them the sure mark of the real Spirit of God. The first of these was the confession of Jesus come in the flesh. It is not merely to confess that He is come, but to confess Him thus come. The second was that He who really knew God hearkened to the apostles. In this way the writings of the apostles become a touchstone for those who pretend to teach the assembly. All the word is so, doubtless; but I confine myself here to that which is said in this place. The teaching of the apostles is formally a touchstone for all other teaching — I mean that which they themselves taught immediately. If any one tells me that others must explain or develop it to have the truth and certainty of faith, I reply, "You are not of God, for he who is of God hearkens to them; and you would have me not to hearken to them; and whatever may be your pretext, you prevent my doing so." The denial of Jesus come in the flesh is the spirit of Antichrist. Not to hear the apostles is the provisional and preparatory form of the evil. True Christians had overcome the spirit of error by the Spirit of God who dwelt in them.

The three tests of true Christianity are now distinctly laid down, and the apostle pursues his exhortations, developing the fullness and intimacy of our relationships with a God of love, maintaining that participation of

nature in which love is of God, and he who loves is born of God — partakes therefore of His nature, and knows Him (for it is by faith that he received it) as partaking of His nature. He who loves not does not know God. We must possess the nature that loves in order to know what love is. He then who does not love does not know God, for God is love. Such a person has not one sentiment in connection with the nature of God; how then can he know Him? No more than an animal can know what a man's mind or understanding is when he has not got it.

Give especial heed, reader, to this immense prerogative, which flows from the whole doctrine of the epistle. The eternal life which was with the Father has been manifested and has been imparted to us: thus we are partakers of the divine nature. The affections of that nature acting in us rest, by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the enjoyment of communion with God who is its source; we dwell in Him and He in us. The first thing is the statement of the truth in us. The actings of this nature prove that He dwells — that, if we thus love, God Himself dwells in us. He who works this love is there. But He is infinite and the heart rests in Him; we know at the same time that we dwell in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. But this passage, so rich in blessing, demands that we should follow it with order.

He begins with the fact that love is of God. It is His nature: He is its source. Therefore he who loves is born of God, is a partaker of His nature. Also he knows God, for he knows what love is, and God is its fullness. This is the doctrine which makes everything depend on our participation in the divine nature.

Now this might be transformed on the one hand into mysticism, by leading us to fix our attention on our love for God, and love in us, that being God's nature, as if it was said, love is God, not God is love, and by seeking to fathom the divine nature in ourselves; or to doubt on the other, because we do not find the effects of the divine nature in us as we would. In effect, he who does not love (for the thing, as ever in John, is expressed in an abstract way) does not know God, for God is love. The possession of the nature is necessary to the understanding of what that nature is, and for the knowledge of Him who is its perfection.

But, if I seek to know it and have or give the proof of it, it is not to the existence of the nature in us that the Spirit of God directs the thoughts of the believers as their object. God, he has said, is love; and this love has been manifested towards us in that He has given His only Son, that we might live through Him. The proof is not the life in us, but that God has given His Son in order that we might live, and further to make propitiation for our sins. God be praised! we know this love, not by the poor results of its action in ourselves, but in its perfection in God, and that even in a manifestation of it towards us, which is wholly outside ourselves. It is a fact outside ourselves which is the manifestation of this perfect love. We enjoy it by participating in the divine nature; we know it by the infinite gift of God's Son. The exercise and proof of it are there.

The full scope of this principle and all the force of its truth are stated and demonstrated in that which follows. It is striking to see how the Holy Spirit, in an epistle which is essentially occupied with the life of Christ and its fruits in us, gives the proof and full character of love in that which is wholly without ourselves. Nor can anything be more perfect than the way in which the love of God is here set forth, from the time it is occupied with our sinful state till we stand before the judgment-seat. God has thought of all: love towards us as sinners, verses 9, 10; in us as saints, verse 12; with us as perfect in our condition in view of the day of judgment, verse 17. In the first verses, the love of God is manifested in the gift of Christ; firstly, to give us life — we were dead; secondly, to make propitiation — we were guilty. Our whole case is taken up. In the second of these verses the great principle of grace, what love is, where and how known, is clearly stated in words of infinite importance as to the very nature of Christianity. Herein is love, not that we have loved God (that was the principle of the law), but in that He has loved us, and has given His Son to make propitiation for our sins. Here, then, it is that we have learnt that which love is. It was perfect in Him when we had no love for Him; perfect in Him in that He exercised it towards us when we were in our sins, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for them. The apostle then affirms, no doubt, that he who loves not knows not God. The pretension to possess this love is judged by this means; but in order to know love we must not seek for it in ourselves, but seek it manifested in

God when we had none. He gives the life which loves, and He has made propitiation for our sins.

And now with regard to the enjoyment and the privileges of this love: if God has so loved us (this is the ground that He takes) we ought to love one another.

No one has ever seen God: if we love one another, God dwells in us. His presence, Himself dwelling in us, rises in the excellency of His nature above all the barriers of circumstances, and attaches us to those who are His. It is God in the power of His nature which is the source of thought and feeling, and diffuses itself among them in whom it is. One can understand this. How is it that I love strangers from another land, persons of different habits whom I have never known, more intimately than members of my own family after the flesh? How is it that I have thoughts in common, objects infinitely loved in common, affections powerfully engaged, a stronger bond with persons whom I have never seen, than with the otherwise dear companions of my childhood? It is because there is in them and in me a source of thoughts and affections which is not human. God is in it. God dwells in us. What happiness! What a bond! Does He not communicate Himself to the soul? Does He not render it conscious of His presence in love? Assuredly, yes. And if He is thus in us, the blessed source of our thoughts, can there be fear, or distance, or uncertainty, with regard to what He is? None at all. His love is perfect in us. We know Him as love in our souls: the second great point in this remarkable passage, the enjoyment of divine love in our souls.

The apostle has not yet said, "We know that we dwell in him." He will say it now. But, if the love of the brethren is in us, God dwells in us. When it is in exercise, we are conscious of the presence of God, as perfect love in us. It fills the heart, and thus is exercised in us. Now this consciousness is the effect of the presence of His Spirit, as the source and power of life and nature, in us. He has given us, not here "his Spirit" — the proof that He dwells in us, but "of his Spirit"; we participate by His presence in us in divine affection through the Spirit, and thus we not only know that He dwells in us, but the presence of the Spirit, acting in a nature which is that of God in us, makes us conscious that we dwell in Him. For He is the infiniteness and perfection of that which is now in us.

The heart rests in this, and enjoys Him, and is hidden from all that is outside Him, in the consciousness of the perfect love in which (thus dwelling in Him) one finds oneself. The Spirit makes us dwell in God, and gives us thus the consciousness that He dwells in us. Thus we, in the savor and consciousness of the love that was in it, can testify of that in which it was manifested beyond all Jewish limits, that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. We shall see further another character of it.

If we compare verse 12 of our chapter 4 with chapter 1:18 of the Gospel by John, we shall better apprehend the scope of the apostle's teaching here. The same difficulty, or if you will, the same truth is presented in both cases. No one has ever seen God. How is this met?

In John 1:18 the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. He who is\* in the most perfect intimacy, in the most absolute proximity and enjoyment of the Father's love, the one eternal, sufficient object that knew the love of the Father as His only Son, has revealed Him unto men as He has Himself known Him. What is the answer in our epistle to this same difficulty? "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." By the communication of the divine nature, and by the dwelling of God in us, we inwardly enjoy Him as He has been manifested and declared by His only Son. His love is perfect in us, known to the heart, as it has been declared in Jesus. The God who has been declared by Him dwells in us. What a thought! that this answer to the fact that no one has ever seen God is equally, that the only Son has declared Him, and that He dwells in us. What light this throws upon the words, "which thing is true in him and in you!"\*\* For it is in that Christ has become our life that we can thus enjoy God and His presence in us by the power of the Holy Ghost. And from this we have seen that the testimony of verse 14 flows.

[\* Note, it is not "was." It is never said in scripture, He left the Father's bosom; but "the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father." As so knowing God, He reveals Him on earth.]

[\*\* This gives us too, in their highest character and subject, the difference between the gospel and epistle.]

We see, also, the distinction between God dwelling in us and we in God, even in that which Christ says of Himself. He abode always in the Father, and the Father in Him; but He says, "The Father who dwelleth in me, he

doeth the works.” Through His word the disciples ought to have believed in them both; but in that which they had seen — in His works — they had rather seen the proof that the Father dwelt in Him. They who had seen Him had seen the Father. But when the Comforter was come, at that day they should know that Jesus was in His Father — divinely one with the Father.

He does not say that we are in God, nor in the Father,\* but that we dwell in Him, and we know it, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have already noticed that He says (chap. 3:24) “hereby we know that he God] abideth in us, because he has given us his Spirit.” Here he adds, We know that we dwell in God, because it is — not the manifestation, as a proof, but — communion with God Himself. We know that we dwell in Him, always as a precious truth — an unchangeable fact; sensibly, when His love is active in the heart. Consequently it is to this activity that the apostle immediately turns by adding “and we have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.” This was the proof for every one, of that love which the apostle enjoyed — as all believers do — in his own heart. It is important to notice how the passage thus first presents the fact of God’s dwelling in us, then the effect (as He is infinite), our dwelling in Him, and then the realisation of the first truth in conscious reality of life.

[\* The only expression in the word that has some resemblance to it is “the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God the Father.” This is addressed to a numerous corporation in quite another sense.]

We may remark here that, while God’s dwelling in us is a doctrinal fact and true of every real Christian, our dwelling in Him, though involved in it, is connected with our state. Thus chapter 3:24, “He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him.” Chapter 4:16, “He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God and God in him.”

Love one to another is indeed taken as the proof that God is there, and His love is perfected in us — this to contrast the manner of His presence with that of Christ (John 1:18). But what we thus know is dwelling in Him and He in us. In each case this knowledge is by the Spirit. Verse 15 is the universal fact; verse 16 brings it fully up to its source. We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. His nature is there declared in itself (for we joy in God); God is love, and he who dwells in love dwells in God

and God in him. There is none anywhere else: if we partake of His nature, we partake of it, and he who abides in it abides in God who is the fullness of it. But then remark that while what He is insisted on, His personal being is carefully insisted on. He dwells in us.

And here comes in a principle of deep importance. It might perhaps be said that this dwelling of God in us and our dwelling in Him depended on a large measure of spirituality, the apostle having in fact spoken of the highest possible joy. But although the degree in which we intelligently realise it is in effect a matter of spirituality, yet the thing in itself is the portion of every Christian. It is our position, because Christ is our life, and because the Holy Ghost is given us. “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him and he in God.” How great the grace of the gospel! How admirable our position because it is in Jesus that we possess it! It is important to hold fast this, that it is the portion of every Christian, the joy of the humble, the strongest reproach to the conscience of the careless.

The apostle explains this high position by the possession of the divine nature — the essential condition of Christianity. A Christian is one who is a partaker of the divine nature, and in whom the Spirit dwells. But the knowledge of our position does not flow from the consideration of this truth, though it depends on its being true, but of that of God’s own love, as we have already seen. And the apostle goes on to say, “We have known and believed the love that God hath to us.” This is the source of our knowledge and enjoyment of these privileges, so sweet and so marvelously exalted, but so simple and so real to the heart when they are known.

We have known love, the love that God has for us, and we have believed it. Precious knowledge! by possessing it we know God; for it is thus that He has manifested Himself. Therefore can we say, “God is love.” There is none beside. Himself is love. He is love in all its fullness. He is not holiness, He is holy; but He is love. He is not righteousness; He is righteous.\*

[\* Righteousness and holiness suppose reference to other things; thus, evil to be known, rejection of evil, and judgment. Love, though exercised towards others, is what He is in Himself. The other essential name that God bears is “light.” We are said to be “light in the Lord” as partakers of the divine



nature; not love, which is, though the divine nature, sovereign in grace. We cannot therefore be said to be love. (See Ephesians 4, 5).]

By dwelling then in love I dwell in Him, which I could not do unless He dwelt in me, and this He does. Here he puts it first, that we dwell in Him, because it is God Himself who is before our eyes, as the love in which we dwell. Therefore, when thinking of this love, I say that I dwell in Him, because I have in my heart the consciousness of it by the Spirit. At the same time this love is an active energetic principle in us; it is God Himself who is there. This is the joy of our position — the position of every Christian.

Verses 14 and 16 present the twofold effect of the manifestation of this love.

First, the testimony that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Quite outside the promises made to the Jews (as everywhere in John), this work is the fruit of that which God Himself is. Accordingly whosoever confesses Jesus to be that Son enjoys all the fullness of its blessed consequences.

Secondly, the Christian has believed for himself in this love, and he enjoys it according to its fullness. There is only this modification of the expression of the glorious fact of our portion — that the confession of Jesus as the Son of God is primarily here the proof that God dwells in us, although the other part of the truth equally says that he who confesses Him dwells also in God.

When speaking of our portion in communion, as believing in this love, it is said, that he who dwells in love dwells in God; for in effect that is where the heart is. Here also the other part of the truth is equally true; God dwells in him likewise.

I have spoken of the consciousness of this dwelling in God, for it is thus only that it is known. But it is important to remember that the apostle teaches it as a truth that applies to every believer. These might have excused themselves for not appropriating these statements as too high for them; but this fact judges the excuse. This communion is neglected. But God dwells in every one who confesses that Jesus is Son of God, and he in

God. What an encouragement for a timid believer! What a rebuke for a careless one!

The apostle returns to our relative position, viewing God as outside ourselves, as Him before whom we are to appear and with whom we have always to do. This is the third great proof and character of love in which it is complete, testifying, as I have already said, that God has thought on all as to us from our sinful state to the day of judgment.

Herein is love perfect with us (in order that we may have boldness for the day of judgment), namely, that as He is, such are we in this world. In truth, what could give us a more complete assurance for that day than to be as Jesus Himself — like the judge? He who will judge in righteousness is our righteousness. We are in Him the righteousness according to which He will judge. We are in respect of judgment as He is. Truly this can give us perfect peace. But observe, that it is not only in the day of judgment that this is so (it gives us boldness for it), but we are it in this world. Not as He was, but in this world we are as He is, and have our known place already, as needed, and according to the nature and counsels of God, for that day. It is ours as being livingly identified with Him.

Now in love there is no fear; there is confidence. If I am sure that a person loves me, I do not fear him. If I am only desiring to be the object of his affection, I may fear that I am not so, and may even fear himself. Nevertheless this fear would always tend to destroy my love for him and my desire to be loved by him. There is incompatibility between the two affections — there is no fear in love. Perfect love then banishes fear; for fear torments us, and torment is not the enjoyment of love. He therefore who fears does not know perfect love. And now what does he mean by “perfect love”? It is that which God is, and which He has fully displayed in Christ, and given us to know and to enjoy by His presence in us, so that we dwell in Him. The positive proof of its complete perfectness is that we are such as Christ is. It is manifested towards us, perfected in us, and made perfect with us. But that which we enjoy is God, who is love, and we enjoy Him by His being in us, so that love and confidence are in our hearts, and we have rest. That which I know of God is that He is love, and love to me, and nothing else but love to me, because it is Himself who is so. Therefore there is no fear.\*

[\* It is striking to see that he does not say, We ought to love Him because He first loved us; but we love Him. We cannot know and enjoy love to us without loving. The sense of love to us is always love. It is not known and valued without its being there. My sense of love in another is love to him. We ought to love the brethren, because it is not their love to us which is the spring of it, though it may nourish it in this way. But we love God because He first loved us.]

If we inquire practically into the history, so to speak, of these affections; if we seek to separate that which in the enjoyment is united, because the divine nature in us, which is love, enjoys love in its perfection in God (His love shed abroad in the heart by His presence therefore); if we wish to specify the relationship in which our hearts find themselves with God in regard to this, here it is: “we love him because he first loved us.” It is grace and it must be grace, because it is God who is to be glorified.

Here, it will be worth our while to notice the order of this remarkable passage. Verses 7-10: We possess the nature of God; consequently we love; we are born of Him, and we know Him. But the manifestation of love towards us in Christ Jesus is the proof of that love; it is thus that we know it. Verses 11-16: We enjoy it by dwelling in it. It is present life in the love of God by the presence of His Spirit in us; the enjoyment of that love by communion, in that God dwells in us, and we thus dwell in Him. Verse 17: His love is perfected with us; the perfection of that love, viewed in the place that it has given us in view of judgment — we are, in this world, such as Christ is. Verses 18, 19: it is thus fully perfected with us. Love to sinners, communion, perfection before God, give us the moral and characteristic elements of that love — what it is in our relationship with God.

In the first passage, where the apostle speaks of the manifestation of this love, he does not go beyond the fact that one who loves is born of God. The nature of God (which is love) being in us, he who loves knows Him, for he is born of Him — has His nature and realizes what it is.

It is that which God has been with regard to the sinner which demonstrates His nature of love. Afterwards, that which we learnt as sinners we enjoy as saints. The perfect love of God is shed abroad in the heart, and we dwell in Him. As already with Jesus in this world, and as He is, fear has no place in one to whom the love of God is a dwelling-place and rest.

Verse 20: the reality of our love to God, fruit of His love to us, is now tested. If we say that we love God and do not love the brethren, we are liars; for if the divine nature, so near us (in the brethren near us), and Christ's value for them, does not awaken our spiritual affections, how then can He who is afar off do so? This also is His commandment, that he who loves God love his brother also. Obedience is found here also (compare John 14:31).

Love for the brethren proves the reality of our love for God. And this love must be universal, must be in exercise towards all Christians, for whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and he who loves a person will love one who is born of Him. And if the being born of Him is the motive, we shall love all that are born of Him (chap. 5:1).

But a danger exists on the other side. It may be, that we love the brethren because they are pleasant to us; they furnish us with agreeable society, in which our conscience is not wounded. A counter-proof is therefore given us. "Hereby we know that we love the children of God, if we love God and keep his commandments." It is not as children of God that I love the brethren, unless I love God of whom they are born. I may love them individually as companions, or I may love some among them, but not as the children of God, if I do not love God Himself. If God Himself has not His true place in my heart, that which bears the name of love to the brethren shuts out God; and that in so much the more complete and subtle manner, because our link with them bears the sacred name of brotherly love.

Now there is a touchstone even for this love of God, namely, obedience to His commands. If I walk with the brethren themselves in disobedience to their Father, it is certainly not because they are His children that I love them. If it were because I loved the Father and because they were His children, I should assuredly like them to obey Him. To walk then in disobedience with the children of God, under the pretext of brotherly love, is not to love them as the children of God. If I loved them as such, I should love their Father and my Father, and I could not walk in disobedience to Him and call it a proof that I loved them because they were His.

If I also loved them because they were His children, I should love all who are such, because the same motive engages me to love them all.

The universality of this love with regard to all the children of God; its exercise in practical obedience to His will: these are the marks of true brotherly love. That which has not these marks is a mere carnal party spirit, clothing itself with the name and the forms of brotherly love. Most certainly I do not love the Father if I encourage His children in disobedience to Him.

Now there is an obstacle to this obedience, and that is the world. The world has its forms, which are very far from obedience to God. When we are occupied only with Him and His will, the world's enmity soon breaks out. It also acts, by its comforts and its delights, on the heart of man as walking after the flesh. In short, the world and the commandments of God are in opposition to each other; but the commandments of God are not grievous to those who are born of Him, for he who is born of God overcomes the world. He possesses a nature and a principle that surmount the difficulties that the world opposes to his walk. His nature is the divine nature, for he is born of God; his principle is that of faith. His nature is insensible to the attractions which this world offers to the flesh, and that because it has, altogether apart from this world, a spirit independent of it, and an object of its own which governs it. Faith directs its steps, but faith does not see the world, nor that which is present. Faith believes that Jesus, whom the world rejected, is the Son of God. The world therefore has lost its power over it. Its affections and its trust are fixed on Jesus, who was crucified, owning Him as the Son of God. Thus the believer, detached from the world, has the boldness of obedience, and does the will of God which abides for ever.

The apostle sums up, in a few words, the testimony of God respecting the life eternal which He has given us.

This life is not in the first Adam, it is in the last — in the Son of God. Man, as born of Adam, does not possess it, does not acquire it. He ought indeed to have gained life under the law. This characterised it, "Do this and live." But man did not and could not.

God gives him eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life, and he who has not the Son has not life.

Now what is the testimony rendered to this gift of life eternal? The witnesses are three: the Spirit, the water, and the blood. This Jesus, the Son of God, is He who came by water and by blood; not by water only, but by water and by blood. The Spirit also bears witness because He is truth. That to which they bear witness is that God has given us eternal life, and that this life is in His Son. But whence did this water and the blood flow? It was from the pierced side of Jesus. It is the judgment of death pronounced and executed (compare Romans 8:3) on the flesh, on all that is of the old man, on the first Adam. Not that the sin of the first Adam was in the flesh of Christ, but that Jesus died in it as a sacrifice for sin. “In that he died he died unto sin once.” Sin in the flesh was condemned in the death of Christ in the flesh. There was no other remedy. The flesh could not be modified nor subjected to the law. The life of the first Adam was nothing but sin in the principle of its will; it could not be subject to the law. Our purification as to the old man is its death. He who is dead is justified from sin. We are therefore baptised to have part in the death of Jesus. We are crucified with Christ; nevertheless we live, but not we, it is Christ who lives in us. Participating in the life of Christ risen, we reckon ourselves as dead with Him; for why live of this new life, this life of the last Adam, if we could live before God in the life of the first Adam? No; by living in Christ we have accepted by faith the sentence of death, passed by God on the first Adam. This is christian purification: even the death of the old man, because we are made partakers of life in Christ Jesus. “We are dead” — crucified with Him. We need a perfect purification before God; we have it, for that which was impure no longer exists: what exists, as born of God, as perfectly pure.

He came by water — a powerful testimony, as flowing from the side of a dead Christ, that life is not to be sought for in the first Adam; for Christ, as coming for man, taking up his cause, the Christ come in the flesh, had to die: else He had remained alone in His own purity. Life is to be sought for in the Son of God risen from among the dead. Purification is by death.

But it was not by water only that He came; it was also by blood. The expiation of our sins was as necessary as the moral purification of our souls. We possess it in the blood of a slain Christ. Death alone could expiate them and blot them out, and Jesus died for us. The guilt of the believer no longer exists before God; Christ has put Himself in his place.

The life is on high, and we are raised up together with Him, God having forgiven us all our trespasses. Expiation is by death.

The third witness is the Spirit: put first in the order of their testimony on earth, as He alone gives witness in power so that we know the other two; last, in their historic order, for such in fact was that order, death first and only thereafter the Holy Ghost.\* In effect it is the testimony of the Spirit, His presence in us, which enables us to appreciate the value of the water and the blood. We should never have understood the practical bearing of the death of Christ, if the Holy Ghost were not to the new man a revealing power of its import and its efficacy. Now the Holy Ghost came down from a risen and ascended Christ; and thus we know that eternal life is given us in the Son of God.

[\* Even the orderly reception of the Holy Ghost was so (see Acts 2:38).]

The testimony of these three witnesses meets together in this same truth, namely, that grace — that God Himself — has given us eternal life; and that this life is in the Son. Man had nothing to do in it, except by his sins. It is the gift of God, and the life that He gives is in the Son. The testimony is the testimony of God. How blessed to have such a testimony, and that from God Himself, and in perfect grace!

We have then the three things: the cleansing, the expiation, and the presence of the Holy Ghost as the witness that eternal life is given us in the Son, who was slain for man when in relationship with man here below. He could but die for man as he is. Life is elsewhere, namely, in Himself.

Here the doctrine of the epistle ends. The apostle wrote these things in order that they who believed in the Son might know that they had eternal life. He does not give means of examination to make the faithful doubt whether they had eternal life; but — seeing that there were seducers who endeavored to turn them aside as deficient in something important, and who presented themselves as possessing some superior light — he points out to them the marks of life, in order to re-assure them; developing the excellence of that life, and of their position as enjoying it; and in order that they might understand that God had given it to them, and that they might be in no wise shaken in mind.

He then speaks of the practical confidence in God which flows from all this — confidence exercised with a view to all our wants here below, all that our hearts desire to ask of God.

We know that He always listens to everything that we ask in accordance with His will. Precious privilege! The Christian himself would not desire anything to be granted him that was contrary to the will of God. But for everything that is according to His will, His ear is ever open to us, ever attentive. He always hearkens; He is not like man, often occupied so that he cannot listen, or careless so that he will not. God always hears us, and assuredly He does not fail in power: the attention He pays us is a proof of His goodwill. We receive therefore the things that we ask of Him. He grants our requests. What a sweet relationship! What a high privilege! And it is one also of which we may avail ourselves in charity for others.

If a brother sins and God chastises him, we may petition for that brother, and life shall be restored him. Chastisement tends to the death of the body (compare Job 33 and 34; James 5:14, 15); we pray for the offender and he is healed. Otherwise the sickness takes its course. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is such sin as is unto death. This does not seem to me to be some particular sin, but all sin which has such a character that, instead of awakening christian charity, it awakens christian indignation. Thus Ananias and Sapphira committed a sin unto death. It was a lie, but a lie under such circumstances that it excited horror rather than compassion. We can easily understand this in other cases.

Thus far as to sin and its chastisement. But the positive side is also brought before us. As born of God, we do not commit sin at all, we keep ourselves, and “the wicked one toucheth us not.” He has nothing wherewith to entice the new man. The enemy has no objects of attraction to the divine nature in us, which is occupied, by the action of the Holy Ghost, with divine and heavenly things, or with the will of God. Our part therefore is so to live — the new man occupied with the things of God and of the Spirit.

The apostle ends his epistle by specifying these two things: our nature, our mode of being, as Christians; and the object that has been communicated to us in order to produce and nourish faith.



We know that we are of God; and that not in a vague way, but in contrast with all that is not us — a principle of immense importance, which makes christian position exclusive by its very nature. It is not merely good, or bad, or better; but it is of God. And nothing which is not of God (that is to say, which has not its origin in Him) could have this character and this place. The whole world lies in the wicked one.

The Christian has the certainty of these two things by virtue of his nature, which discerns and knows that which is of God, and thereby judges all that is opposed to it. The two are not merely good and bad, but of God and of the enemy. This as to the nature.

With regard to the object of this nature, we know that the Son of God is come — a truth of immense importance also. It is not merely that there is good and that there is evil; but the Son of God has Himself come into this scene of misery, to present an object to our hearts. But there is more than this. He has given us an understanding that in the midst of all the falsehood of this world, of which Satan is the prince, we may know Him that is true — the true One. Immense privilege which alters our whole position! The power of the world by which Satan blinded us is completely broken, and we are brought into the true light; and in that light we see and know Him who is true, who is in Himself perfection; that by which all things can be perfectly discerned and judged according to truth. But this is not all. We are in this true One, partakers of His nature, and abiding in Him, and in order that we may enjoy the source of truth.\* Now it is in Jesus that we are. It is thus, it is in Him, that we are in connection with the perfections of God.

[\* I have already noticed this passage as being a kind of key to the way we really know God, and dwell in Him. It speaks of God as Him we know, in whom we are, explaining it by saying, that it is in His Son Jesus Christ our Lord; only here, as follows in the text, it is truth and not love.]

We may again remark here — that which gives a character to the whole epistle — the manner in which God and Christ are united in the apostle's mind. It is on account of this that he so frequently says, "He," when we must understand "Christ," although he had previously spoken of God: for instance, chapter 4:20. And here, "We are in him that is true that is to say], in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."

Behold then the divine links of our position! We are in Him who is true; this is the nature of Him in whom we are. Now, in reality as to the nature, it is God Himself; as to the Person, and as to the manner of being in Him, it is His Son Jesus Christ. It is in the Son, in the Son as man, that we are in fact as to His Person; but He is the true God, the veritable God.

Nor is this all; but we have life in Him. He is also the eternal life, so that we possess it in Him. We know the true God, we have eternal life.

All that is outside this is an idol. May God preserve us from it, and teach us by His grace to preserve ourselves from it! This gives occasion to the Spirit of God to speak of “the truth” in the two short epistles that follow.

## 2 JOHN

The second and third epistles of John insist on the truth. The second warns the faithful against the reception of those who do not teach the doctrine of Christ, especially the truth respecting the Person of Christ. The third encourages believers to receive and help those who teach it. Accordingly they both (and the second especially) lay stress on “the truth.”

The apostle loved this elect lady, “in the truth”; as did also all those who had known the truth, and that for the truth’s sake. He wished her blessing in truth and in love. He rejoiced that he had found some who were her children walking in the truth. He desired that there should be mutual love among Christians, but this was love, that they should keep the commandments; for many deceivers were come into the world. Now whosoever transgressed, and did not abide in the doctrine of Christ, had not God. He ends his epistle, of which we have given an almost complete summary, by exhorting this lady, in case any one should come and not bring this doctrine, not to receive him into our house, nor say to him, “God bless you, or be with you,” or “I salute you.” For to do so would be to make herself a partaker in the evil he was doing.

The false doctrine which was abroad at that moment was the denial of the truth of Christ come in the flesh; but the apostle says in a general way that, if any one transgressed and did not abide in the doctrine of Christ, he had not God.

We learn several important things in this little epistle. The mission of a man who went about preaching was never brought into question, but the doctrine which he brought; if he brought sound doctrine he was welcome.

A woman having the word — as this epistle, for example — was capable of judging his doctrine, and responsible to do so. Inexorable rigor was to be maintained, if the doctrine as to the Person of Christ was touched. The door was to be shut against whoever falsified it. They were not even to say to him, “I salute you”; for they who did so became partakers of his evil work. It would be to help on the deceits of Satan.

Moreover the semblance of love which does not maintain the truth, but accommodates itself to that which is not the truth, is not love according to God. It is the taking advantage of the name of love in order to help on the seductions of Satan. In the last days the test of true love is the maintenance of the truth. God would have us love one another; but the Holy Ghost, by whose power we receive this divine nature, and who pours the love of God into our hearts is the Spirit of truth; and His office is to glorify Christ. Therefore it is impossible that a love which can put up with a doctrine that falsifies Christ, and which is indifferent to it, can be of the Holy Ghost — still less so, if such indifference be set up as the proof of that love.

The doctrine of the reward and crown of glory, which the laborer possesses in the fruits of his ministry, is presented in a very strong light in verse 8. This second epistle puts Christians on their guard against all that is equivocal with respect to the Person of Christ; and exhorts to an unwavering firmness on this point.

### 3 JOHN

The third epistle encourages the believer to the exercise of hospitality, whether towards the known brethren or strangers, and to all benevolent care in furthering their journey when departing, provided that they come with the truth and for the truth's sake without salary or provision. Gaius received them, as it appears, and was helpful to them both in his own house and on their journey. Diotrephes, on the contrary, did not love these strangers, who went about, it is said, without a formal mission and without any visible means of subsistence. They had gone forth for the Lord's sake and had received nothing from the Gentiles. If they in reality came out of love to that name, one did well to receive them.

Again the apostle insists on the truth, as characterising real love: "Whom I love in the truth," he says to Gaius. He rejoiced when the brethren (those, I imagine, whom Gaius had received into his house and helped on their journey) testified of the truth that was in him, as in effect he walked in the truth. The apostle had no greater joy than that of hearing that his children walked in the truth. In receiving those who went forth to preach the truth, they helped the truth itself; they were co-workers with it. Diotrephes would have nothing to do with this; he not only refused to receive these itinerant preachers, but excommunicated those who did so. He claimed authority for himself. The apostle would remember it. It was their duty to do good. "He that doeth good is of God."

He goes so far, with regard to the truth, as to say, that the truth itself bore witness to Demetrius. I suppose that the latter had propagated it, and that the establishment and confirmation of the truth everywhere — at least where he had labored — was a testimony with regard to himself.

This insistence on the truth, as the test for the last days, is very remarkable; and so is this preaching itinerary by persons who took nothing of the Gentiles when they came forth, leaving it to God to cause them to be received of those who had the truth at heart, the truth being their only passport among Christians, and the only means by which the apostle could guard the faithful. It appears that they were of the Jewish race, for

he says, “receiving nothing of the Gentiles,” the apostle thus making the distinction. I notice this, because, if it be so, the force of the expression “and not for ours only” (1 John 2:2) becomes simple and evident, which it is not to every one. The apostle, as Paul does, makes the difference of us, Jews, though one in Christ. We may also remark that the apostle addressed the assembly, and not Diotrephes, its head; and that it was this leader who, loving pre-eminence, resisted the apostle’s words, which the assembly, as it appears, were not inclined to do.

Gaius persevered in his godly course, in spite of the ecclesiastical authority (whatever may have been its right or pretended right) which Diotrephes evidently exercised: for he cast persons out of the assembly.

When the apostle came, he would (like Paul) manifest his real power. He did not own in himself an ecclesiastical authority to remedy these things by a command. These epistles are very remarkable in this respect. With regard to those who went about preaching, the only means he had, even in the case of a woman, was to call her attention to the truth. The authority of the preacher lay altogether in that. His competency was another matter. The apostle knew no authority which sanctioned their mission, the absence of which would prove it to be false or unauthorised. The whole question of their reception lay in the doctrine which they brought. The apostle had no other way to judge of the authority of their mission: there was then no other; for, had there been any, that authority would have flowed from him. He would have been able to say, “Where are the proofs of their mission?” He knew none but this — do they bring the truth? If not, do not salute them. If they bring the truth, you do well to receive them, in spite of all the Diotrephes in the world.

## JUDE

The epistle of Jude develops the history of the apostasy of Christendom, from the earliest elements that crept into the assembly to corrupt it, down to its judgment at the appearing of our Lord, but as moral apostasy by turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. In John they are gone out; here they have crept in, corrupting. It is a very short epistle, and containing instruction presented with much brevity, and with the energetic rapidity of the prophetic style, but of immense weight and extensive bearing.

The evil which had stolen in among Christians would not cease until destroyed by judgment.

We have already noticed this difference between the epistle of Jude and the second of Peter, that Peter speaks of sin, Jude of apostasy, the departure of the assembly from its primitive state before God. Departure from the holiness of faith is the subject that Jude treats. He does not speak of outward separation. He views Christians as a number of persons professing a religion on the earth, and originally true to that which they professed. Certain persons had crept in among them unawares. They fed themselves without fear at the love-feasts of the Christians; and although the Lord would come attended by all His saints (so that the faithful will have been already caught up), yet in the judgment these persons are still accounted to be in the same class — "to convince," he says, "all that are ungodly among them." They may indeed be in open rebellion at the moment of judgment, but they were individuals who had once formed a part of the company of Christians; they were really apostates, enemies left behind.

When it is said, "These be they who separate themselves," it does not mean openly from the visible assembly, for he speaks of them as in the midst of it; but they set themselves apart, being in it, as more excellent than others, like the Pharisees among the Jews. Jude points them out as being in the midst of the Christians, and presenting themselves as such.

The judgment falls upon this class of persons; the taking up of the saints has left them behind for judgment.

Jude begins by declaring the faithfulness of God and the character of His care for the saints, which answers to the prayer of Jesus in John 17. They were called ones, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ. Happy testimony! which magnifies the grace of God. "Holy Father," our Lord said, "keep them": and these were sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ. The apostle speaks with a view to the forsaking by many of the holy faith; he addresses those who were kept.

He had purposed writing to them of the salvation common to all Christians; but he found it needful to exhort them to stand fast, to contend for the faith once given to the saints. For already was that faith being corrupted by the denial of the rights of Christ to be Lord and Master; and thus also, by giving the reins to self-will, they abused grace, and turned it into a principle of dissoluteness. These are the two elements of the evil which the instruments of Satan introduced, the rejection of the authority of Christ (not His name): and the abuse of grace, in order to indulge their own lusts. In both cases it was the will of man, which they set free from everything that bridled it. The expression "Lord God" points out this character of God. "Lord" here is not the word generally used; it is despot; that is, "master."

Having pointed out the evil which had secretly crept in, the epistle goes on to show them that the judgment of God is executed upon those who do not walk according to the position in which God had originally placed them.

The evil was, not only that certain men had crept in among them — in itself an immense evil, because the action of the Holy Ghost is thereby hindered among Christians — but that, definitely, the entire testimony before God, the vessel which held this testimony, would become (as had been already the case with the Jews) corrupt to such a degree that it would bring down upon itself the judgment of God. And it has become thus corrupt.

This is the great principle of the downfall of the testimony, established by God in the world, by means of the corruption of the vessel which contains



it, and which bears its name. In pointing out moral corruption as characterising the state of professors, Jude cites, as examples of this downfall and of its judgment, the case of Israel, who fell in the wilderness (with the exception of two, Joshua and Caleb), and that of the angels who, not having kept their first estate, are reserved in chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

This example suggests to him another case, that of Sodom and Gomorrha, which presents immorality and corruption as the cause of judgment. Their condition is a perpetual testimony here on earth to their judgment.

These ungodly men, with the name of Christians, are but dreamers; for the truth is not in them. The two principles which we have noticed are developed in them: filthiness of the flesh, and contempt for authority. The latter manifests itself in a second form, namely, the license of the tongue, the self-will that manifests itself by speaking evil of dignities. Whereas, the text says, the archangel Michael durst not rail even against the devil, but with the gravity of one who acts according to God, appealed to the judgment of God Himself.

Jude then sums up the three kinds or characters of the evil and of estrangement from God; first, that of nature, the opposition of the flesh to the testimony of God and His true people, the impetus which this enmity gives to the will of the flesh; in the second place, ecclesiastical evil, teaching error for reward, knowing all the while that it is contrary to the truth and against the people of God; third, open opposition, rebellion, against the authority of God in His true King and Priest.

At the time when Jude wrote his epistle, those persons whom Satan introduced into the church in order to stifle its spiritual life and to bring on the result which the Spirit views prophetically, were dwelling in the midst of the saints, took part in those pious feasts at which they gathered together in token of their brotherly love. They were “spots” in those “feasts of charity,” feeding without fear in the pastures of the faithful. The Holy Ghost denounces them energetically. They were doubly dead, by nature and by their apostasy; without fruit, bearing fruit that perished, as out of season; plucked up by the roots; foaming out everywhere their own shame; wandering stars, reserved for darkness. Of old the Spirit had announced by the mouth of Enoch the judgment that should be executed

upon them. This presents a very important aspect of the instruction here given; namely, that this evil which had crept in among the Christians would continue and still be found when the Lord should return for judgment. He would come with the myriads of His saints to execute judgment upon all the ungodly among them for their acts of iniquity and their ungodly words which they had spoken against Him. There would be a continuous system of evil from those in the apostles' time till the Lord came. This is a solemn witness to what would go on among Christians.

It is quite remarkable to see the inspired writer identifying the favorers of licentiousness with the rebels who will be the object of judgment in the last day. It is the same spirit, the same work of the enemy, although restrained for the moment, which will ripen for the judgment of God. Alas for the assembly! It is, however, but the universal progression of man. Only that, grace having fully revealed God and delivered from the law, there must now be either holiness of heart and soul, and the delights of obedience under the perfect law of liberty, or else licence and open rebellion. In this the proverb is true, that the corruption of that which is the most excellent is the worst of corruptions. We must add here, that the admiration of men, in order to gain advantage by them, is another characteristic feature of these apostates. It is not to God that they look.

Now the apostles had already warned the saints that these mockers would come, walking after their own lusts, exalting themselves, not having the Spirit, but being in the state of nature.

Practical exhortation follows for those who were preserved. According to the energy of spiritual life, and the power of the Spirit of God, they were by grace to build themselves up, and to keep themselves in the communion of God. The faith is, to the believer, a most holy faith; he loves it, because it is so; it puts him into relationship and communion with God Himself. That which he has to do in the painful circumstances of which the apostle speaks (whatever may be the measure of their development), is to build himself up in this most holy faith. He cultivates communion with God, and profits through grace by the revelations of His love. The Christian has his own proper sphere of thought, in which he hides himself from the evil that surrounds him, and grows in the knowledge of God from whom nothing can separate him. His own portion is always the more evident to

him, the more the evil increases. His communion with God is in the Holy Ghost, in whose power he prays, and who is the link between God and his soul; and his prayers are according to the intimacy of this relationship, and animated by the intelligence and energy of the Spirit of God.

Thus they kept themselves in the consciousness, the communion, and the enjoyment of the love of God. They abode in His love while sojourning here below, but, as their end, they were waiting for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. In effect when one sees what are the fruits of the heart of man, one feels that it must be His mercy which presents us without spot before His face in that day for eternal life with a God of holiness. No doubt it is His unchangeable faithfulness, but, in the presence of so much evil, one thinks rather of the mercy. Compare, in the same circumstances, what Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:16. It is mercy which has made the difference between those that fall and those that stand (compare Exodus 33:19). We must also distinguish between those who are led away. There are some who are only drawn aside by others, others in whom the lusts of a corrupt heart are working; and where we see the latter we must manifest hatred to everything that testifies this corruption, as a thing that is unbearable.

The Spirit of God in this epistle does not bring forward the efficacy of this redemption. He is occupied with the crafty devices of the enemy, with his efforts to connect the actings of the human will with the profession of the grace of God, and thus to bring about the corruption of the assembly, and the downfall of Christians, by putting them on the road to apostasy and judgment. Confidence is in God; to Him the sacred writer addresses himself in closing his epistle, as he thinks of the faithful to whom he was writing. Unto Him, he says, who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us unspotted before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy.

It is important to observe the way in which the Spirit of God speaks in the epistles of a power that can keep us from every fall, and unblamable; so that a thought only of sin is never excusable. It is not that the flesh is not in us, but that, with the Holy Ghost acting in the new man, it is never necessary that the flesh should act or influence our life (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:22). We are united to Jesus: He represents us before God, He is our righteousness. But at the same time He who in His perfection is

our righteousness is also our life; so that the Spirit aims at the manifestation of this same perfection, practical perfection, in the daily life. He who says "I abide in Him," ought to walk as He walked. The Lord also says, "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

There is progress in this. It is Christ risen who is the source of this life in us, which ascends again towards its source, and which views the risen and glorified Christ, to whom we shall be conformed in glory, as its end and aim (see Philippians 3). But the effect of this is, that we have no other aim: "this one thing I do." Thus, whatever may be the degree of realisation, the motive is always perfect. The flesh does not come in at all as a motive, and in this sense we are blameless.

The Spirit then — since Christ who is our righteousness is our life — links our life to the final result of an unblamable condition before God. The conscience knows by grace that absolute perfection is ours, because Christ is our righteousness; but the soul which rejoices in this before God is conscious of union with Him, and seeks the realisation of that perfection according to the power of the Spirit, by whom we are thus united to the Head.

To Him who can accomplish this, preserving us from every kind of fall, our epistle ascribes all glory and dominion throughout all ages.

That which is peculiarly striking in the epistle of Jude is that he pursues the corruption of the assembly from the creeping in of some unawares on to its final judgment, showing withal that it is not arrested but passes through its various phases to that day.

# REVELATION

## PREFACE de 1867 (THE FIRST EDITION)

En communiquant ici le rsultat de l'tude que j'ai faite du livre de l'Apocalypse, je reconnais pleinement que bien des parties de ce livre restent obscures; je m'appliquerai exposer celles qui me paraissent claires, sans les affirmer tous gards, comme je ferais, et comme tout chrkien devrait faire, au sujet d'une grande partie de l'enseignement de l'criture.

J'ajoute immdiatement aussi que j'envisagerai toute la priode dtermine qui doit prceder l'apparition du Fils de l'homme dans les nues du ciel, comme formant une seule demi-semaine et non pas deux. Ce point de vue ne change rien aux faits, ni aux personnages; les relations de dtail, pour ce qui concerne les temps, et la porte de certains passages en sont seuls affects. Un grand nombre de traits, qui se sont occups du mme sujet, prtendent que l'Apocalypse nous rvle les faits spciaux de deux demi-semaines. Le lecteur pourra faire la comparaison des traits et le point de vue que je lui prsente ici, et il acquerra ainsi, par l'tude du livre, une plus ample connaissance de la liaison des diffrentes parties qui le constituent.

A part le tmoignage direct de l'amour de Dieu et du salut personnel, l'criture, dans son ensemble, nous prsente deux grands sujets, savoir le gouvernement de ce monde et l'glise. Celle-ci est maintenant, par le Saint-Esprit, le vase et le dpositaire de la connaissance divine. Ceux qui en sont les membres sont les instruments de la diffusion de cette connaissance. L'glise n'enseigne pas. Les aptres et prophètes d'abord; ensuite les docteurs et les vanglistes, chacun sa place, eux enseignent. L'glise reoit, garde et professe la vrit. L'tat de l'glise peut tre tel que le maintien et la profession de la vrit se trouvent rejets sur la fidlit individuelle; mais l'glise, dans son tat normal, doit tre la colonne et le soutien de la vrit (1 Timothy 3:15).

L'glise appartient au ciel: sa part est d'tre dans le ciel, maintenant, en esprit, et quand la plnitude des temps aura amen l'accomplissement des

conseils de Dieu, d'être l, de fait, associe Christ dans le gouvernement de la terre. Elle est proprement l'pouse et le corps de Christ. Mais l'glise a aussi une existence exterieure et responsable sur la terre: elle devrait tre une lettre de Christ, connue et lue de tous les hommes (comp. 2 Corinthians 3:2, 3), et reprsenter ainsi le caractre de Dieu devant le monde. Sous ce rapport, elle est envisage, dans l'criture, comme une dispensation responsable dans le monde, la maison de Dieu, l'difice de Dieu, o les hommes peuvent mal btir, quoique le fondement puisse avoir t bien pos. Christ difiera sa propre uvre au travers de toutes les phases de l'existence de l'glise et aura l'glise, sa maison, illumine de sa lumire et de sa gloire, parfaite dans la gloire. Aucune puissance de celui qui a l'empire de la mort ne peut prvaloir contre cette uvre sur la terre, ni contre son rsultat dans le ciel; mais l'glise, en tant que confie au service responsable de l'homme sur la terre, occupe la place d'une dispensation, pour tre coupe et rejete, si elle ne persvre pas dans sa fidlit et ne manifeste pas la gloire qui lui a t confie. Il en est d'elle comme de tous les objets des voies de Dieu ici-bas. L'homme innocent, d'abord; ensuite les promesses; puis la loi, la sacrificature, la royaut judaïque dans l'obissance avec la loi, la suprmatie gentile sans loi aucune, tout cela a t successivement confi aux hommes; et l'homme a toujours failli! Mais tout sera rtabli en grce en Christ ou sous Christ, le second Adam, dont le premier n'tait qu'une image; les promesses seront accomplies, la loi sera crite dans le cur, la sacrificature ralise dans toute son excellence, la royaut juive exerce dans la personne du Fils de David et la suprmatie sur les nations dans Celui qui s'lvera pour dominer sur elles. L'glise pareillement, quoique ne faisant pas partie de cette chane des dispensations de Dieu sur la terre, est cependant, comme sphre de la manifestation de la gloire celeste de Christ par la fidlit de l'homme sur la terre, comme la maison de Dieu par l'Esprit, sujette la mme loi divine: responsabilit dans l'homme, chute, et puis accomplissement divin en grce et en puissance. Ses assembles (glises) locales, les chandeliers, tombent sous la mme loi: dans leur tat normal, elles reprsentent localement l'tat normal de l'glise, ce qui est manifest du corps de Christ sur la terre; mais comme il en est pour l'glise dans son ensemble, elles aussi peuvent se corrompre de telle sorte qu'il faille que le chandelier soit t. Il y a cette diffrence entre ce qui a lieu pour l'glise et ce qui a lieu pour les glises locales, que la mise de ct du chandelier laisse l'assemble en gnral subsistant sur la terre, tandis que lorsque la responsabilit de l'Assemble tout entire prend fin, celle-ci cesse d'tre comme scne des voies

de Dieu sur la terre. C'est pourquoi nous sommes srs que ce dernier fait ne pourra jamais s'accomplir avant que le temps, o celle qui est l'pouse et le corps de Christ doit avoir le ciel pour demeure, ne soit venu aussi.

L'Apocalypse nous rule Christ comme Fils de Dieu ou Ancien des jours, avec son droit divin de Juge; elle porte nos regards sur le jugement de l'Assemble et le jugement du monde, plus particulièrement sur celui de la dernire puissance apostate: si nous la lisons avec une autre pense, nous ne la comprendrons jamais. Les communications de l'Apocalypse ont donc un caractre essentiellement prophtique. Elles ne nous occupent pas des relations directes du Pre avec ses enfants, et des relations de Christ avec celle qui est son pouse et son corps, bien que, la fin du livre, l'pouse soit mentionne pour identifier la ville avec elle; les saints, sans doute, ont conscience de la grce dans laquelle ils sont, comme aussi l'glise, la fin, a conscience de sa relation avec Christ; mais, je le rpte, ce n'est nullement de ces sujets-l que traite l'Apocalypse; tout au contraire. Ce livre est essentiellement prophtique, parce qu'il s'occupe de gouvernement et du monde; et l'Assemble elle-mme y est envisage dans sa responsabilit sur la terre, sous le caractre dans lequel nous la voyons finalement rejete, non pas assurment comme le corps de Christ uni son Chef dans le ciel, mais sur la terre comme Assemble responsable.

Il est de la plus haute importance, non seulement dans l'tude de l'Apocalypse, mais l'gard de la vrit en gnral, de distinguer nettement les deux points de vue que nous venons de signaler; il est impossible autrement de jamais connatre l'glise. D'un autre ct, on ne peut avoir la connaissance de l'glise sans faire immdiatement la distinction dont nous parlons.

Tout ce qui concerne Christ, sauf la relation de Christ avec l'glise, se trouve dj dans l'Ancien Testament; tout ce qui le concernait lui-mme tait manifest, ouvertement rvl, mais l'glise ne pouvait pas l'tre. Le principe essentiel de son existence renversait le mur mitoyen de clture qui sparait le Juif des nations; le principe essentiel de l'existence d'Isral et de la loi maintenait et devait maintenir ce mur. La responsabilit du premier homme, sans cela, n'et pas t compltement mise l'preuve. L'glise et notre relation avec Dieu reposent sur le fait que cette responsabilit a pris fin par la mort, et que le second homme, ressuscit d'entre les morts, a pris une toute

nouvelle place, son uvre ayant t accepte et lui-mme, en consequence, ayant t accept aussi et glorifi,et nous en Lui et cause de Lui. Notre responsabilit mme, comme chrtiens, est d'une autre nature: nous sommes appels marcher comme Lui a march (1 Jean 2:6), non pas nous lever ce qu'Adam aurait d tre ou ce que la loi exigeait, mais manifester la vie de Jsus dans nos corps mortels, comme tant morts au pch, au monde et la loi, et vivants de cette vie qui descendit ici-bas dans la personne du Fils venu du ciel.

Je dois ajouter ici, cependant, qu'il ne faut pas chercher dans l'Ancien Testament la rvlation du Pre par le Fils qui demeure ternellement dans son sein: on y trouve bien, sans doute, la relation de fils, en sorte que la pense de cette relation n'est pas trangre l'Ancien Testament, mais cette relation y est envisage un point de vue conventionnel (vrai aussi, je n'ai pas besoin de le dire) comme une relation forme sur la terre et dans le temps, mais non pas fonde sur la nature de la personne du Fils dans la Dit. Ainsi dans les passages du Psalm 2: Je raconterai le decret: l'ernel m'a dit: Tu es mon Fils; aujourd'hui, je t'ai engendr, et du premier livre des Chroniques, chap. 17:13: Moi, je lui serai pour Pre, et lui me sera pour Fils, il s'agit d'une relation dans le temps sur la terre, des droits et du vrai et glorieux caractre du Messie. Il en est de mme de ce que nous lisons ailleurs: Je ferai de lui le premier-n, le plus lev des rois de la terre; et: Et son roi sera lev au-dessus d'Agag (Psalm 39:27; Nombr. 24:7). Mais dans le Nouveau Testament, nous trouvons le Fils dans sa propre relation personnelle avec le Pre: Personne ne vit jamais Dieu;\* le Fils unique, qui est dans le sein du Pre, lui, l'a fait connatre (Jean 1:18); il a fait connatre de mme aussi, quand il tait sur la terre, le nom du Pre (Jean 17:26); il tait sorti d'auprs du Pre (Jean 17:8). Par lui, le Fils, Dieu a cre toutes choses, et Lui, le Fils, nous introduit dans cette relation d'enfants et de fils, par adoption, sans doute, mais en devenant, Lui, notre vie, en sorte qu'il n'est jamais dit, dans l'criture, que la vie soit en nous, quoique nous ayons la vie et que l'criture dise que nous l'avons. Dieu nous a donn la vie ternelle, et cette vie est dans son Fils: Celui qui a le Fils a la vie, celui qui n'a pas le Fils de Dieu n'a pas la vie (1 Jean 5:11-12).

[\* Voyez 1 Jean 4:12, l'inexprimable privilge du chrtien.]

Ce caractre particulier de l'enseignement de Jean m'amne examiner de plus prs la nature et le caractre de l'Apocalypse. En effet, c'est Jean tout spcialement qui rvle le dernier point de vue dont je viens de parler, en mme



temps qu'il traite des vrits qui sont lies notre salut, et particulirement de la prsence du Saint-Esprit, et, dans son ptre, de la propitiation. Dans l'vangile, c'est le Fils qui est venu comme vie, la vie tant la lumire des hommes. Dans l'ptre, cette vrit forme la base: la vie nous est communique et l'existence de la vie est dmontre par son vrai caractre, afin de nous garder des sducteurs.

Il est remarquable que, part, et l, quelques rares et courts passages necessaires, pour complter la vrit, Jean ne voit jamais la vie amene jusqu' son accomplissement final selon les conseils de Dieu, mais la vie manifeste dans ce monde, soit en Christ lui mme, soit en nous. Le fait que nous monterons dans la maison du Pre, en haut, est clairement tabli au commencement du chap. 14, et dsir la fin du chap. 17; mais nulle part ce fait ne forme le sujet gnral. Paul, n comme un avorton en dehors du temps rgl, entre la premire et la seconde venue de Christ, Paul qui ne connaissait Christ que dans la gloire cleste dans laquelle il etait dans le ciel, l'homme glorifi par Dieu en consequence de l'uvre qu'il avait accomplie, et qui n'tait pas appel connatre Christ selon la chair, Paul, l'aptre particulier de l'Assemble, le ministre de l'Assemble pour complter la Parole de Dieu, lui qui fut converti par la rvlation de la gloire cleste de Christ, d'un ct, et de l'union des saints avec Lui ainsi glorifi, d'un autre, Paul, dis-je, nous place, parfaitement accepts, dans la gloire en Christ, et voit cette vie en Celui qui est ressuscit et glorifi, et en nous, crucifis avec Lui, mais vivants toutefois. Je ne vis plus, moi, mais Christ vit en moi (Galatians 2:20). Mais Jean nous fait connatre la personne divine du Fils en vie (en grce dans la chair; l'amour divin, et le Pre, se manifestant) dans sa glorieuse supriorit sur le mal et, comme fait l'amour divin, s'adaptant aux besoins et aux souffrances qui l'entourent, toutes les ncessits du cur de l'homme, et tant cependant toujours lumire. Jean ne nous prsente pas l'homme lev au ciel, mais Dieu lui-mme en grce, le Fils rvlant le Pre, ici-bas sur la terre. L'vangile de Jean et la premire ptre du mme aptre, nous l'avons dit, rvlent cette vie en elle-mme ou en nous; mais l'vangile (car l'ptre nous parle de la vie entre le dpart et le retour du Seigneur) nous fait entrevoir, la fin (Jean 22:22-23), l'aptre maintenant persvramment un tmoignage la venue de Christ. Jsus n'avait pas dit que Jean ne dt pas mourir, mais: Si je veux qu'il demeure jusqu' ce que je vienne, que t'importe! Paul pouvait difier l'glise ou en poser le fondement comme un sage architecte; Pierre pouvait enseigner un

plerin comment il devait suivre Celui qui etait ressuscit et qui l'avait  
 rengendr ainsi pour une esprance vivante; il pouvait lui apprendre  
 comment il devait suivre son Matre travers le dsert, dans lequel, aprs tout,  
 Dieu gouvernait toujours; Paul et Pierre, et d'autres avec eux, pouvaient  
 donner des avertissements au sujet de maux venir; mais Jean, qui avait t si  
 personnellement prs de Christ, juif dans ses relations et rempli de celles-ci,  
 mais de qui Dieu avait, en mme temps, ouvert les yeux pour voir la gloire  
 de Celui qui, en Lui-mme etait lev au-dessus de toute relation, si ce n'est  
 avec le Pre, et qui avait une place dans laquelle il pouvait tre dans le sein du  
 Pre, et cependant marcher comme homme, avec le titre et dans la  
 manifestation du Fils, sur la terre, ayant en mme temps une place dans le  
 cur de son disciple, Jean, que la grce avait attach la personne de Christ et  
 qui avait la vie en Lui, Jean, le disciple que Jsus aimait, lui, pouvait veiller,  
 avec la puissance de l'amour divin, sur les gloires dclinantes de l'glise sur la  
 terre, avec l'nergie d'une vie qui ne pouvait pas dfaillir en elle; il pouvait  
 devancer les temps par la vision prophtique, pour tablir, du ciel et de la  
 part du ciel, les droits de la mme personne, sur la terre, droits dont  
 l'tablissement devait amener la paix sur la terre et ter le mal de la terre, et  
 qui devaient avoir tout leur effet l o le prophte avait vu ces droits mpriss  
 dans la personne de Celui qui tait l'objet de tant d'amour de sa part, en  
 tant que manifest sur la terre. Jean pouvait ainsi lier l'excellence de Celui  
 qui avait souffert et qui tait maintenant glorifi, avec la bndiction du monde  
 d'livr, que la grce pouvait bnir par Lui, quoiqu'il l'et autrefois rejet. Les  
 voies, par lesquelles Dieu accomplira ces choses, avec l'histoire antrieure  
 de la chute de l'glise, forment le sujet de l'Apocalypse, avec la personne et  
 la gloire (prophatiquement connues) de Christ, en connection d'abord avec  
 l'Assemble responsable sur la terre, quoique, alors, judiciairement, et  
 ensuite avec la terre.]

## THE REVELATION

As regards Peter and Paul, we have scriptural authority for regarding them as the apostles respectively of the circumcision and of the uncircumcision. Peter and the twelve remained at Jerusalem when the disciples were scattered, and, continuing (though God was careful to maintain unity) the work of Christ in the remnant of Israel, gathered into an assembly on earth, the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Paul, having received the ministry of the assembly, as of the gospel to every creature under heaven (Colossians 1), as a wise master-builder, lays the foundation. Peter sets us off as pilgrims on our journey to follow Christ risen towards the inheritance above. Paul, in the full development of his doctrine (though owning this, as in Philippians 3), shows us the saints sitting in heavenly places in Christ, heirs of all which He is heir of. All this was dispensational, and it is full of instruction. But John holds a different place. He does not enter on dispensation; nor, though once or twice stating the fact (as John 13:1; 14:1; 17:24; 20:17), does he take the saint, nor even the Lord Himself, up to heaven. Jesus, for him, is a divine Person, the Word made flesh manifesting God and His Father, eternal life come down to earth. The epistle of John treats the question of our partaking of this life, and its character.

But at the close of the Gospel, after stating the sending of the Comforter on His going away, Christ opens to the disciples (though in a mysterious way) the continuation of God's dealings with the earth, of which John ministerially is the representative, linking the manifestation of Christ on earth at His first coming with His manifestation at His second; Christ's Person, and eternal life in Him, being the abiding security and living seed of God, when dispensationally all was corrupted, and in confusion and decay. If all were in disorder outwardly, eternal life was still the same.

The destruction of Jerusalem formed a momentous epoch as to these things, because the Jewish assembly, formed as such at Pentecost, had ceased (nay, it had even before); only the judicial act was then accomplished. Christians had been warned to leave the camp. The breach of Christianity with Judaism was consummated. Christ could no longer take up the assembly, established in the remnant of the Jews, as His own

seat of earthly authority.\* But alas! the assembly, as Paul had established it too, had already fallen from its first estate — could in no sense take up the fallen inheritance of Israel. All seek their own, says Paul, not the things of Jesus Christ. All they of Asia — Ephesus, the beloved scene where all Asia had heard the word of God — had forsaken him. They who had been specially brought with full intelligence into the assembly's place could not hold it in the power of faith. Indeed, the mystery of iniquity was at work before this, and was to go on and grow until the hindrance to the final apostasy was removed.

[\* This was morally true from Acts 3, where the Jewish leaders refuse the testimony to a glorified Christ who would return, as they had rejected a humbled One. Acts 7, by the mouth of Stephen, closes God's dealings with them in testimony, and the heavenly gathering begins, his spirit being received on high. The destruction of Jerusalem closed Jewish history judicially.]

Here, in this state of universal declension and ruin, John's ministry comes in. Stability was in the Person of Christ, for eternal life first, but for the ways of God upon earth too. If the assembly was spued out of His mouth, He was the faithful witness, the beginning of the creation of God. Let us trace the links of this in his Gospel. In John 20, as elsewhere noticed in detail, we have a picture of God's ways from the resurrection of Christ till we come to the remnant of Israel in the latter days, represented by Thomas's look on the pierced One and believing by seeing. In chapter 21 we have, besides the remnant, the full millennial gathering. Then at the close of the chapter, the special ministry of Peter and John is pointed out, though mysteriously. The sheep of Jesus of the circumcision are confided to Peter; but this ministry was to close like Christ's. The assembly would not be established on this ground, any more than Israel. There was no tarrying here till Christ came.\* Peter's ministry in fact was closed, and the circumcision assembly left shepherdless, before the destruction of Jerusalem put an end to all such connection for ever. Peter then asks as to John. The Lord answers, confessedly mysteriously, but putting off, as that which did not concern Peter who was to follow Him, the closing of John's ministry, prolonging it in possibility till Christ came. Now, in fact, the Bridegroom tarried; but the service and ministry of John by the word (which was all that was to remain, and no apostle in personal care) did go on to the return of Christ.

[\* Paul, of course, is in no way noticed. For him the assembly belonged to heaven — was the body of Christ, the house of God. He was a builder.]

John was no master-builder like Paul — had no dispensation committed to him. He was connected with the assembly in its earthly structure like Peter, not in the Ephesus or heavenly one; he was not the minister of the circumcision, but carried on the earthly system among the Gentiles, only holding fast the Person of Christ. His special place was testimony to the Person of Christ come to earth with divine title over it — power over all flesh. This did not break the links with Israel, as Paul's ministry did, but raised the power which held all together in the Person of Christ to a height which carried it through any hidden time, or hidden power, on to its establishment over the world at the end; it did not exclude Israel as such, but enlarged the scene of the exercise of Christ's power so as to set it over the world, and did not establish it in Israel as its source, though it might establish Israel itself in its own place from a heavenly source of power.

What place does the assembly then hold in this ministry of John, found as it is in the book of Revelation? None in its Pauline character, save in one phrase, coming in after the Revelation is closed, where its true place in Christ's absence is indicated (chap. 22:17). We have the saints at the time, in their own conscious relationship to Christ, in reference, too, to the royal and priestly place to His God and Father, in which they are associated with Himself. But John's ministerial testimony, as to the assembly, views it as the outward assembly on earth\* in its state of decay — Christ judging this — and the true assembly, the capital city and seat of God's government over the world, at the end, but in glory and grace. It is an abode, and where God dwells and the Lamb. All this facilitates our intelligence of the objects and bearing of the book. The assembly has failed; the Gentiles, grafted in by faith, have not continued in God's goodness. The Ephesian assembly, the intelligent vessel, and expression of what the assembly of God was, had left its first estate, and unless it repented, the candlestick was to be removed. The Ephesus of Paul becomes the witness on earth of decay and of removal out of God's sight, even as Israel had been removed. God's patience would be shown towards the assembly as it had been towards Israel; but the assembly would not maintain God's testimony in the world any more than Israel had. John does maintain this testimony, ministerially judging the assemblies by Christ's word,\*\* and

then the world from the throne, till Christ comes and takes to Himself His great power and reigns. During this transition-dealing of the throne the heavenly saints are seen on high. When Christ comes, they come with Him.

[\* And hence in particular assemblies, which of course could be judged and removed. There is another point of divine wisdom here. Though we have, I doubt not, the whole history of the assembly to its end in this world, it is given in facts then present, so that there should be no putting off the coming of the Lord. So, in the parables, the virgins who go to sleep are the same that wake up; the servants that receive the talents are the same found on the Lord's return, though we know ages have passed and death come in.]

[\*\* Note this immensely important principle: the church judged by the word, not the church a judge; and the individual Christian called to give heed to this judgment. The church (I use the word designedly here as used to claim this authority) cannot be an authority when the Lord calls me, if I have ears to hear, to hear and receive the judgment pronounced by Him on it. I judge its state by the words of the Spirit, am bound to do so: it cannot be an authority therefore on the Lord's behalf over me in that state. Discipline is not in question here, but the church as wielding authority.]

The first part, then, of the epistles of John is the continuation, so to speak, of the Gospel before the last two dispensational chapters; the Revelation, that of these last two chapters (20, 21), where, Christ being risen and no ascension given, the dispensational dealings of God are largely intimated in the circumstances which occur; while it is shown at the same time that He could not personally set up the kingdom then. He must ascend first. The two short epistles show us that truth (truth as to His Person) was the test of true love, and to be held fast when what was anti-christian came in; and the free liberty of the ministration of the truth to be held fast against assumed ecclesiastical or clerical authority, as contrasted with the assembly. The apostle had written to the assembly. Diotrephes rejected free ministry.

I now turn to the book itself.

The Revelation is one belonging to Jesus Christ, which God gave Him, and He signifies it to John. Though God over all blessed for ever, He is here seen as Son of man, the rejected Messiah or Lamb, and so Head over all things. This fact, that the revelation is one confided to Him, is important, because it at once makes it the testimony of Jesus and the word of God, being communicated by Jesus, and given to Him by God. This testimony

of Jesus and word of God comes as a vision to John, who bare record of all he saw. All of it is prophetic in character, not the Spirit of God the messenger of the Father and of the Son's grace to the assembly in its own place — a direct inspired communication to the assembly itself for itself as in its own right place — but a prophetic revelation to John about it as in the world, and about the world itself.

The assembly being already in decay and to be removed, whatever the delay of grace, the time was at hand, and the rejection of the assembly on earth to be taken as a starting-point. Another system was to be set up. The apostle had not his face turned towards the assemblies at all, but his back. The mind of the Spirit is towards Christ's taking the kingdom. Still Christ was yet amongst them, but as Son of man, the character in which He judges and inherits the world. The apostle turns and sees Him. Still it behoved, if he was recounting the coming dealing with the world in judgment, to notice by the bye "the things that are." By giving them in seven contemporary churches, no time was necessary; it left the final results as at the door, for they were in the last days, yet it gave, if there was delay, opportunity for a full moral picture of the whole of the assembly's history. I see in this only the wisdom of the Spirit, and exactly the character of John's ministry. "If I will that he tarry till I come."

I cannot doubt then for a moment that (while professedly of universal application for every one that had an ear, not an address to the general conscience of the assembly) the seven assemblies represent the history of Christendom, the assembly as under man's responsibility, the fact of the judgment of the world coming afterwards on its close (the assemblies being "the things that are") and the character of events, beginning with the assembly leaving its first love, and ending with holding fast till He comes, and with being spued out of Christ's mouth. The adoption of the number seven, which cannot mean completeness at the same time because the states are different; the reference to Christ's coming; the reference to the great tribulation to come on all the earth in the letter to Philadelphia; the clear object of warning the assembly till Christ came, the world being then in scene for judgment: all leave no cloud upon the conclusion that the seven churches are successive phases of the professing assembly's history, though not exactly consecutive (the fourth going on to the end; new phases then commencing, and going on to the end collaterally also).\*

[\* There are moral reasons from the contents. We shall see, farther on, that the structure of the book fully confirms this.]

But though the assembly be thus spoken of, God Himself appears here as the administrator of the world, even when addressing the assembly; and Christ as man coming under Him to this purpose, the Holy Ghost being noticed as the direct agent of power in the sevenfold perfection in which it is exercised. It is not the Father and the Son, but God who is, yet who embraces past and future in His being, and is never inconsistent with Himself, making good in time all in which He has announced Himself in the past. The form of this however is peculiar here. It is not merely the abstract idea of Jehovah, who was, and is, and is to come. He is first announced by His present absolute existence, “from him who is,” the “I am,” God Himself; and then to connect Himself with previous dealings (not present relationships) declares that He is the One who was (had revealed Himself in previous ages to the earth or to men, to the Abrahams and Moses’s of old time), and at the same time was the coming One who would make good everything revealed of and by Himself. Jesus Christ (who comes last as the Man in immediate connection with God’s witness to, and government of, the earth) is presented as the faithful witness — as He was personally on earth — of God; as risen from the dead (but no ascension or headship of the assembly), taking all in this character, not after the flesh; and lastly, in government not yet made good, the Prince of the kings of the earth.

The saints then express their own consciousness of what He has done for them, yet still in reference to the kingdom, not as the body or bride, or their own heavenly joys, but the highest possible as regards the given glory and place. This is the necessary consequence of the consciousness of a near and blessed relationship. Whatever the glory of the One we are in relationship with, it is what He is for oneself, one’s own nearness to Him, that comes to the mind when the glory is declared. Were a general to march in triumph into a town, the feeling of a child or wife would be, ‘That is my father, — ’ ‘That is my husband.’ Here the feeling, though of this character, is more unselfish. “To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.” It is His love to us which is celebrated, still with the personal feeling “us.” The saints know what He has done for them, and further what He has made them. His love is perfect. King and Priest are



His highest characters here: nearest to God in power downwards, and in approaching Him upwards. He has made us kings and priests to God and His Father: to Him be glory! Such is the saints' thought when He is spoken of. He loved us, has cleansed us, and given us a place with Himself. This flows out the instant He is named. It is the answer of heart when He is announced, before any communication takes place. His having done this is not announced; it is the saints' own consciousness.\*

[\* We shall find the same thing at the close when the prophecy is ended. Here what He has been to the saints and has done: there what He is for the future. See chapter 22:17.]

As to others, all must be told. The next point, the first announced, is His appearing to the world. No direct communication to the assembly for its own sake — the book is not that. Here the assembly has that in its own consciousness only, as we have seen. Behold! He cometh with clouds; every eye shall see Him, the Jews too who pierced Him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. His appearing is in judgment.

We then find, what is so remarkable in John, the mixing up in expression of God and Christ. Verse 8 cannot be said to be one or the other. It is Christ; but it is Christ Jehovah, Almighty, the Lord; who is, and who was, and who is to come; the first and the last (compare chap. 22:12, 13).

Thus, we have the saints of these days; Christ's appearing to judgment; He is God, the first and the last, Alpha and Omega; the complete circle of position from John's day to the end. The practical position which John takes with all the saints, is "the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." He belongs to the kingdom, but must wait while Christ waits, expecting till His enemies be made His footstool. The generic name given to testimony applies to all his ministry as well as to the prophecy — the word of God and the testimony of Jesus: only one might have thought that prophecy was not this last, as it was not to the assembly about itself from its Head; but the Spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.

Such is the introduction to this book. We now enter on its contents. John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. It is his place and privilege however then, as a Christian, which is spoken of, not the prophetic period into which he entered. In the day of resurrection — his own place — the day on which Christians meet, the apostle, removed from the society of

Christians, still enjoyed the special elevating power of the Holy Ghost, though alone; and is thus used of God, allowed to be banished for the purpose, for what He could not, in an ordinary way, have communicated to the assembly for its edification. The persecuting emperor little thought what he was giving to us when he banished the apostle; no more than Augustus, in his political plans as to the census of the empire, knew he was sending a poor carpenter to Bethlehem, with his espoused wife, that Christ might be born there; or the Jews and Pilate's soldiers, that they were sending the thief to heaven, when they broke his legs in heartless respect for their own superstitions or ordinances. God's ways are behind the scenes; but He moves all the scenes which He is behind. We have to learn this, and let Him work, and not think much of man's busy movements: they will accomplish God's. The rest of them all perish and disappear. We have only peacefully to do His will.

The same voice that afterwards called John up to heaven, he now hears behind him on earth — the voice of the Son of man. It summons his attention with power; and turning to see the voice, as Moses towards the bush, he sees, not the image of God's presence in Israel, but the vessels of God's light in the earth, and a complete summary of it all, and, in the midst of them, Christ as Son of man. We find, thus, in the Revelation, God's whole history of the world, or of what is of Him in it, from the first decay of the assembly to the new heavens and new earth. But it was impossible for God to set aside the present expectation of Christ, or to justify the assembly in its careless but sinful thought, "My Lord delayeth His coming." Hence, as always, this history, and especially that of the assembly, is given in a way which leaves time out altogether. The moral progress of the assembly is given in pictures of the state of the existing assemblies selected for that purpose, beginning with its first decline, and ending with its entire rejection. Being taken up as assemblies, the general principle of responsibility is in view, and the assembly viewed, not as the infallibly blessed body of Christ, but such as that it may be rejected and set aside on earth; for a local assembly and the external visible assembly clearly can.

These assemblies are seen as distinct light-bearers; that is, in their place of service, or rather position of witness in the world. They are viewed in their own proper character as of God; as set by Him in the world, they are of

gold. He may take them away because they give a dim, or no true light or witness for God; but the thing taken away was founded in divine righteousness, and founded originally by a divine hand.

But the Spirit first occupies itself with the character of Him who stood amongst them. First, we get His actual position, before stating what He was. He stood as Son of man. We have not Him here as Head of the one body, nor even as heavenly Intercessor; nor have we the Christ, of course (that is, the Jewish character of the Lord). It will be found that these are just the characters of Christ omitted also in the first chapter of John's Gospel. John sees Him in the wide character in which He is set over all the works of God's hand, and Heir of all promises and purposes of God to man according to divine righteousness. He is not the Son of man in service. His garment is down to His feet, and He has the girdle of divine righteousness about His breasts. This is His character.

We have then His qualities or attributes. First, He is the Ancient of days. In Daniel the same truth comes out. The Son of man is brought to the Ancient of days; but, farther on in the chapter, it is the Ancient of days who comes. The Son of man is Jehovah. This characterises all the testimony. The King of kings and Lord of lords shows Him:\* but, when He comes, we find that He is King of kings and Lord of lords.\*\* But in this glory He has the attributes of judgment — eyes of fire — that which pierces into everything, and fire is ever the sign of judgment. This was its piercing, searching character: His feet, the firmness with which sin was met; for brass is righteousness, viewed, not as intrinsically in God to be approached, but as dealing with man, in his responsibility as man. The mercy-seat was gold, the altar and laver brass; but there it was as an altar, that is, dealing with sin for man, a sacrifice, though fire was there, but here the burning furnace of judgment. The voice was the sign of power and majesty.

[\* 1 Timothy 6:15.]

[\*\* Revelation 19:16.]

Next, we have official supremacy. He held all that was subordinate authority in light and order, here spoken of as regards the assembly, in His right hand, in His power. He had the power of judgment by the word, and supreme authority — the sun — in the fullness of its highest character. We

have His personal glory as Jehovah; His qualities as divine Judge; and His supreme official position.

But, He was not less the Redeemer, the gracious securer in blessing of them that were His. John (as ever in prophetic vision of Jehovah, for it is not the Spirit of adoption here) falls at His feet as one dead. So Daniel; so in spirit Isaiah (chap. 6); but His power sustains the saint, does not destroy him. He lays His right hand on John himself, declares Himself the first and the last, Jehovah Himself, but withal the same that died in love and has complete power over death and hades; the deliverer from it, not the subjecter to it. He has risen out of death and hades, and has the keys — full power over them — divine power or support; and He who died and rose again, and lives for ever even as man, does so, not simply in the power of divine life in man, but of victory over all that man was subject to by sin and infirmity.

This is the position He here takes with John His servant, and with the assemblies respectively. We shall see that the state of the latter assemblies brings out other characters known only to the opened eye of faith. These were what John had seen, and which he was to write. Then as regards prophetic facts, he was to write the things that were, the state of these various assemblies as the setting forth historically of the assembly's various state — a history; and the things which should be after them (that is, when the assembly's history has closed on earth). The whole assembly therefore, is thus, to the Spirit, the present time — the "things that are." The future was what came after it, God's dealings with the world. This, while it left the coming of the Lord, or preparatory prophetic events in immediate expectation, left, if there was delay (and there was to be), the period undefined, and the expectation, though prolonged, still a present one. We may remark that we have the personal glory of Christ here, the position as to the assemblies accompanying it. He is not personally revealed as Son of man, that is, as taking the Son of man's place: only He who is Ancient of days is so seen as to make us understand that it was one who had that place — was Son of man. Subsequently, in the Apocalypse, it is not His intrinsic personal character, but some relative character or place He takes. Only we have something analogous to this, when the account of future things comes in. As regards the world, He is seen as the Lamb, one whom the world has rejected, but who has redemption right

over it. There He is seen with the seven horns and seven eyes — His power over the world, as with the seven stars here as Son of man. These are the things John had seen.

We now pass to “the things that are.” The stars are in Christ’s hand; He speaks of them first; He walks in the midst of the assemblies. The latter are light-bearers, the assemblies or assembly as set in a given position, and viewed as such before God; not what the people became, but what the assembly is in His sight; just as Israel was His people whatever the Israelites became. The stars are that which is held by Christ to give light and have authority, what He holds responsible to this end before Him. It is, in a certain sense, all composing the assembly therefore, and so it is often said in the addresses to the assemblies; but more especially those who stand in responsibility through their connection with Himself, the stars in His hand. They should shine, and influence, and represent Him, each in its place during the night. That the clergy gradually took this place, and in this sense are responsible in it, is quite true; but that is their affair to answer for themselves before the Lord. The Spirit does not so take it here. They assume it as honor; they have it as responsibility. If ever they were called “angels,” it was evidently just this assumption, and taken from this place. Again, it cannot be doubted that leaders, elders, or others, were in a special place of responsibility, supposing them to be rightly such. In Acts 20 they are so treated; but the Spirit does not so own them here. Christ does not address Himself to elders, nor to the modern notion of a bishop, which did not indeed exist then. Nor is a diocese\* thought of in these addresses. You have not the authorities (elders) spoken of in scripture, of which there were always several; and this passage of scripture cannot be applied to human arrangements as now existing.

[\* Except in some parts of the world, those called bishops are always bishops of a city, showing historically that dioceses are a subsequent arrangement. Angels were not chief officers of the synagogue.]

What then is the angel? It is not a symbol, properly speaking. The star is the symbol, and it is here seen in Christ’s hand. It is (as angel is always used where it is not actually a heavenly or earthly messenger) the mystical representative of one not actually seen. It is so used of Jehovah, so used of a child, so spoken of Peter. Elders may have practically been specially responsible from their position; but the angel represents the assembly, and

especially those to whom, from nearness to Christ and communion with Him, or responsibility for it through the operation of His Spirit in them for His service, He looks for the state of His assembly in His sight. No doubt the whole assembly is responsible, and therefore the candlestick is removed when unfaithfulness is brought home to it; but Christ is in immediate communication with these in respect of it — a solemn thought for all who have the good of the assembly at heart.

The way in which the angels and the assemblies are identified, and any distinction in the degree or manner of it, requires a little more detailed attention. That the assemblies are addressed in their general responsibility, in the addresses to the angels, is evident. For it is said, “What the Spirit saith to the churches.” It is not a private communication to an authority for his direction, as to a Titus or a Timothy, but said to the assemblies; that is, the angel represents their responsibility. So we find distinct parts of them noticed. “The devil shall cast some of you into prison”; “fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer”: “but I have a few things against thee, that thou hast there”: “My faithful martyr who was slain among you”: “But unto you I say, the rest in Thyatira” (so it is to be read). Yet the angel and assembly or candlestick are distinguished: “I will remove thy candlestick out of its place.” “Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel.”

But this separation between the angel and the assembly does not take place in the last three assemblies. The angel is addressed throughout. As to them too it is only said, Christ has the seven stars, not that He holds them in His right hand. In Smyrna and Philadelphia there is no judgment; they were tried, as faithful, and encouraged. As to judgments, or rather warning threats: in the case of Ephesus, which presents the general fact of the assembly’s first decline, the warning is given that the candlestick would be taken away unless they repented: that the assembly did not, we know from scripture and fact, and these assemblies looked at as a successive history. In Pergamos and Thyatira the offenders are those specifically judged; in the case of Thyatira fearful judgments on Jezebel and those connected with her: she had had time to repent and did not; but here the change of everything is looked for at the Lord’s coming. All this shows the angels to be the representatives of the assemblies, but morally such; Christ’s warning to be addressed to them (as we can easily understand to be the case in any who had the interest of the assembly at heart), whom

Christ trusted with this; but to be so far identified with the assemblies that it concerned all who composed them, while particular judgments were denounced on guilty parties.

We may now enter on the series of particular assemblies; but briefly, in connection with the whole structure of the book, rather than entering into the instructive details, which I have done elsewhere in a series of lectures.

The first great fact is, that the assembly in this world is subject to judgment, and to have its whole existence and place before God as light-bearer in the world set aside; secondly that God will do this if it departs from its first spiritual energy. This is an immense principle. He has set the assembly to be a true witness of what He has manifested in Jesus; of what He is when Jesus is gone on high. If it be not this, it is a false witness, and it will be set aside. God may have patience, and has blessedly so. He may propose to her to return to her first love, and does; but, if this do not take place, the candlestick is removed, the assembly ceases to be God's light-bearer in the world. The first estate must be maintained, or God's glory and the truth are falsified; and the creature must be set aside. But no mere unsustained creature does this, none as such. Hence all fails and is judged, save as in, or upheld by, the Son of God, the second Man. Ephesus had gone on well in maintaining consistency, but that forgetfulness of self and thinking only of Christ, which are the firstfruits of grace, were gone. As heretofore remarked, there were works of labor and patience; but the faith, hope, and love had in their true energy disappeared. They had rejected the pretension of false teachers, and labored and not fainted. All that can be said of them is said to show Christ's love, and that He is not forgetful of them, or of the good manifested in them. Still they had left their first love; and this unless repented of and the first works done, involved the taking away of the candlestick.

Another important principle is found here, that when the assembly had departed from faithfulness, when collectively it had ceased to be the expression of the love in which God has visited the world, God throws back individuals on the word of God for themselves: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." The assembly is judged, and thus cannot be the security for faith; the individual is called to hear

what the Spirit says. The warning of taking away the candlestick here is specially worthy of notice, because there was a great deal the Lord highly approved of — encouraged them by showing He did; but, for all that, if first love was departed from, the candlestick would be removed.

The character of Christ and promises are general, as the assembly is characteristic of the whole principle on which the assembly stands. Christ has the stars in His right hand and walks amidst the candlesticks. It is not a special character applicable to a special state, but the whole bearing of His position in the midst of the assemblies. The assembly, viewed as having left its first love, is never promised anything. It cannot direct a believer when it comes under reproof and judgment itself. The promise is then to the individual overcomer: a very important principle. The promise given to him that overcomes is the general one — is the contrast to Adam's ruin, but in a higher and better way than that in which he enjoyed the good which he lost. He that overcomes shall eat of the tree of life. But this is not the tree of life in man's paradise in this world, but the paradise of God Himself. We must remark, too, that it is not as the first Adam now, individually keeping one's first estate, but overcoming. And what is before us to overcome in is, not only the world and its hostilities (though that may be), but within the sphere of the assembly itself. It is the call to hear what the Spirit says to the assemblies which gives occasion to the speaking of overcoming. This, in respect of the claim of the assembly to be heard, is an immensely important truth. The message is addressed to the assembly, not by it to individuals, and she is warned of her delinquency, and the individual saint is called to overcome.

The word to Smyrna is short. Whatever the malice and power of Satan, at the utmost, if permitted, he has but the power of death. Christ is First and Last, beyond as before death, God Himself; but more than that, has met and gone through its power. The saints were not to fear. Satan would work, be allowed to sift, to imprison. Let the saints only be faithful to the extreme point of his power; all beyond was beyond him, was Christ's; and the faithful one would receive from Him the crown of life. Tribulation, poverty, the contempt of those who pretended to have the legitimate hereditary claim to be God's people — always the persecutors, be they Jews or Christians — was the portion of the assembly here; and God suffered it. It was really mercy to the declining assembly. Their hope was



beyond it all when Christ gave the crown of life. This made the assembly, sliding into the world, or about to do it insensibly through decline of its first love, sensible that the world was in Satan's hands — was not the rest of saints. But, if the Lord permitted, He limited, the tribulation. All was in His hands. Not only was there the crown for the sufferers, but whoever overcame, his portion was secure: the death of judgment, the second death, would not hurt him.

We now need a closer judgment. Christ appears as the One having the two-edged sword of the word proceeding out of His mouth. It will be remarked here, that, in Smyrna and Pergamos, a special character of Christ applies to a special state. There is no general result for the assembly. In Ephesus we have Christ's position as Judge in the midst of the candlesticks, and the assembly threatened with removal from its place of witness upon earth. In Thyatira He takes His place as Son of God, Son over His own house, and, as things are (as to the assembly) got to the worst, is revealed in all-piercing and immutable judgment, and the whole blessing of the new state is promised to the overcomer. In Pergamos we have faithfulness found in its previous path, Christ's name and faith held fast in spite of persecution. It differs from Philadelphia, that His word is not said to be held fast as that of Christ's patience (that the assembly, in its Pergamos state, did not do), but it did hold fast the confession of Christ in the midst of persecution. But another kind of evil came inseduction to fall in with the world's ways by evil teaching within. The doctrine of Balaam was there. Idolatry flowed in. There were also sects within, which taught pretended sanctity but evil practice. These the Lord would judge.

The general truth of removing the candlestick had no place here, neither as a general truth, when the assembly could be called on to keep its first love, nor as fiery judgment, because it was gone wholly astray; but there were corrupters, and Christ's servants were led into idolatry and evil. Individual approbation by Christ, communion with Himself in future blessing (in spirit then), as the once humbled and rejected One (which the assembly was ceasing to be), a name given by Christ, and so of tenderness on His part, a link known only to him who had it. In a word, individual association and individual blessing of secret delight — this was the promise to the overcomer when corruption was advancing, not yet dominant and unhindered in the assembly.

In Thyatira the assembly reaches to the close. There was found, in what Christ owned in this state of things, increasing devotedness. But Jezebel was allowed; and both connection with the world, idolatry, and children begotten to it in the assembly itself. All would be judged, great tribulation fall on Jezebel, and her children be killed. Christ searched the heart and reins, and applied judgment in unchangeable righteousness. The faithful ones of this epoch, the “you” that Christ specially addresses, are but a “rest,” a remnant, but specially and growingly devoted. It is, we may remark here, what the assemblies are towards Christ, which is especially in view. What Jezebel did towards the faithful ones is not noted. The Lord’s coming is the time looked to; and the whole millennial blessing is promised to him that overcomes; both to reign with Christ, and Christ the Morning Star Himself. “He that hath an ear” is now put after the overcoming; not said in connection with the assembly, but with those who overcome in it. The state is the state characterised by this. Thyatira may go on to the end, but does not characterise the witness of God to the end; other states must be brought in to do that. It is, I have no doubt, the Popery of the middle ages, say to the Reformation; Romanism itself goes on to the end. The judgment on Jezebel is final. The Lord had given her space to repent, and she had not repented. It would be a forced association with those whom she had once seduced to the ruin of them all. The whole character here is piercing judgment according to God’s one nature and requirements; special trial and judgment, yet the blessing not special, but the portion of the saints at large in that which they have with Christ; as the departure and judgment were complete — adultery, not merely failure in first love.

We have seen the close at the Lord’s coming contemplated in Thyatira. Sardis begins a new collateral phase of the assembly’s history. Save the having the seven stars, none of the ecclesiastical characters of Christ, none of those noticed in Him as walking in the midst of the assemblies, are noticed. Still the assembly is noticed as such. It is still the history of the assembly. But, the Lord’s coming having been noticed, all characteristics of Christ refer to what He will have in the kingdom. Still He has yet the seven stars — supreme authority over the assembly. It is nothing peculiar to this assembly He has it over, and as to, all. It is in this character He has to do with Sardis. He has the seven spirits, the fullness of the perfection in which He will govern the earth. Thus He is competent to bless in the

assembly, though there is no regular ecclesiastical connection. He has power over all, and the fullness of the Spirit; both in perfection. Whatever the assembly is, He is all this. This is a great comfort. The assembly cannot fail in the place of witness through want of fullness of grace in Him. Nor can He fail him who has ears to hear.

But the state of the assembly showed that it was far from availing itself of it. It had indeed a name to live; it was superior in its pretensions to the evil of Thyatira; nor were there Jezebels and corruption. But there was practically death. There was no completeness in her works before God. It was not evil here, but lack of spiritual energy. But this did leave individuals to defile their garments in the world. She was called to remember, not her first works, but what she had received and heard, the truth committed to her, the gospel and word of God; if not, she would be treated as the world. The Lord would come as a thief; for the Lord's coming is now always in view.

There is no threat of removing the candlestick: that was settled. Judgment, setting aside the assembly, was fixed. But this body would be treated as the world, not ecclesiastically as a corrupt assembly (compare 1 Thessalonians 5). However, some had preserved their integrity, and would be owned, and they would walk with Christ as those that had done righteousness. This was the promise too. They had confessed His name practically before men, before the world, and theirs would be confessed before God when the nominal assembly was treated as the world. They were real Christians in the midst of a worldly profession, and their names would not be struck out of the register, then ill-kept on earth, but infallibly rectified by heavenly judgment. It has been remarked that, simultaneously with bringing in the Lord's coming, the ear to hear comes after the distinguishing of the overcomers. Such a remnant only is looked for. I cannot doubt that we have Protestantism here.

The assembly of Philadelphia has a peculiarly interesting character. Nothing is said of its works, but that Christ knows them. But what is interesting in it is that it is peculiarly associated with Christ Himself. Christ, as in all these last assemblies, is not seen in the characters in which He walked in the midst of the assemblies, but in such as faith peculiarly recognises when ecclesiastical organisation has become the hot-bed of

corruption. Here it is His personal character, what He is intrinsically, holy and true, what the word displays and requires, and what the word of God is in itself — moral character and faithfulness. Indeed this last word includes all faithfulness to God within and without, according to what is revealed, and faithful to make good all He has declared.

Christ is known as the Holy One. Then outward ecclesiastical associations or pretensions will not do. There must be what suits His nature, and faithful consistency with that word which He will certainly make good. With this He has the administration; and opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens. See what His path was on earth: only then graciously dependent, as we are. He was holy and true, to man's view had a little strength, kept the word, lived by every word that proceeded out of God's lips, waited patiently for the Lord, and to Him the porter opened. He lived in the last days of a dispensation, the holy and true One, rejected, and, to human eye, failing in success with those who said they were Jews, but were the synagogue of Satan. So the saints here: they walk in a place like His; they keep His word, have a little strength, are not marked by a Pauline energy of the Spirit, but do not deny His name. This is the character and motive of all their conduct. It is openly confessed, the word kept, the name not denied. It seems little; but in universal decline, much pretension and ecclesiastical claim, and many falling away to man's reasonings, keeping the word of Him that is holy and true, and not denying His name is everything.

And this element is noticed. Christ, the holy and true One, is waiting. Here on earth He waited patiently for Jehovah. It is the character of perfect faith. Faith has a double character — energy which overcomes, and patience which waits for God and trusts Him (see the first in Hebrews 11 23-34; the latter in v. 8-22). It is the latter which is found here; the word of patience kept.

But as regards the former substantive qualities, keeping the word, and not denying Christ's name (though with a little strength) in presence of ecclesiastical pretension to a successional God-established religion, promises were given. Christ would force these pretentious claimants to divine succession to come and own that He had loved those who kept His word. An open door was given at present, and no man could shut it; just as

the porter had opened to Him, so that scribes and Pharisees and priests could not hinder it. In the future they would have to own themselves humbled, and that those who followed the word of the holy and true One were those He had loved. Meanwhile His approbation was sufficient. This was the test of faith — to be satisfied with His approbation, content with the authority of His word.

But there was a promise also as to the Lord's judgments in the earth. Christ is waiting till His enemies be made His footstool. We must wait for it to see the world set right. We have to go on where the God of this world has his way, though under divine limitation. The thought that good is to have its rights in this world is to forget the cross and Christ. We cannot have our rights till He has, for we have none but His. Judgment (since Pilate had it, and Christ was the righteous One before him) has not yet returned to righteousness. Till then Christ waits, though at the right hand of God; and we wait. It is not persecution and martyrdom, as in Smyrna. It is as hard a task perhaps, or, at any rate, our task now — patience and contentedness with Christ's approbation, keeping His word, not denying His name.

But then there were other and blessed encouragements. There was an hour of temptation coming upon all the world to try those who belonged to earth, who dwelt there as belonging to it. Some might be spared, victorious in the trial; but those who kept the word of Christ's patience would be kept from it. On the whole world it would come; and where were they? — Out of the world. They had not belonged to it when in it. They had been waiting for Christ to take His power — waiting His time to have the world. They belonged to heaven, to Him who was there; and they would be taken to be with Him when the world was to be in the time of terrible trial. There was a special time before He took His power; and not only would they reign with Him in result, but they would be kept from that hour, and had the assurance of it in the time of their trial. And hence the Lord points them to His coming as their hope; not as warning that the unrepentant would be treated as the world when He appeared. He came quickly, and they were to look for the crown then, holding fast what they had, feeble but spiritually associated with Him as they were, lest any should take it.

We have now the general promise in heavenly places marked by special association with Christ; and they are publicly owned in that in which they seemed on earth to have nothing. Others had the pretension to be the people of God, the city of God — to have divine religious title; these were only consistent with His word, and they waited for Christ. Now, when Christ takes His power, when things are real, according to Him in power, they have this place according to God. It was the cross and contempt below; it is the display of God's name and heavenly city above.

Let us examine the promise to the overcomers here. He who had but a little strength is a pillar in the temple of the God in whom and with whom he is blessed. He was held perhaps as outside the ecclesiastical unity and order; he is a pillar in it in heaven, and will go no more out. On him who was hardly owned to have a part in grace has the name of his rejected Savior's God been stamped publicly in glory. He who was hardly accounted to belong to the holy city has its heavenly name written on him too, and Christ's new name — the name not known to prophets and Jews according to the flesh, but which He has taken as dead to this world (where the false assembly settles down) and risen into heavenly glory. The careful association with Christ is striking here, and gives its character to the promise. "The temple of my God," says Christ; "the name of my God"; "of the city of my God," "my new name." Associated in Christ's own patience, Christ confers upon him what fully associates him in His own blessing with God. This is of peculiar blessing, and full of encouragement for us.

Laodicea follows. Lukewarmness characterises the last state of profession in the assembly. It is nauseous to Christ; He will spue it out of His mouth. It was not mere want of power, it was want of heart — the worst of all ills. This threat is peremptory, not conditional. It brought irremediable rejection. With this want of heart for Christ and His service, there was much pretension to the possession of resources and competency in themselves; "I am rich," whereas they had nothing of Christ. It is the professing assembly accounting itself rich without having Christ as the riches of the soul by faith. Therefore He counsels them to buy of Him true and approved righteousness, clothing for their moral nakedness, and what gave spiritual sight; for they were, as respects what Christ is and gives before God, poor, naked, and miserable, and specially so. This is Christ's

judgment of their pretended acquisitions according to man. However, as long as the assembly subsists, Christ continues to deal in grace, stands at the door and knocks, presses reception of Himself in the closest way on the conscience. If any one, still in what He was going to spue out, heard His voice and opened, He would give him admission to be with Him, and a part in the kingdom.

There is no coming here; nor was there for the judgment of Jezebel. That was practically Babylon; and she is judged before Christ comes. This is spued out of Christ's mouth, cast off as worthless to Him; but the general body is judged as the world. The Lord's coming is in Thyatira for the saints, and in Philadelphia too. That is its aspect as to the assembly, and that only. Sardis is reduced, if unrepentant, to the condition of the world, and judged as such. When the state of Laodicea arrives, the assembly is disowned and rejected of Christ in that character: but for that His coming is not to be spoken of. Although Thyatira goes down to the end and closes ecclesiastically the assembly's history, yet only in the first three is the assembly at large treated as the subject of repentance. In Thyatira space had been given Jezebel to repent, and she did not: and the scene is to close and be replaced by the kingdom. In this respect the last four assemblies go together. There is no prospect of repentance of the whole assembly, or restoration. Sardis is called to hold fast and repent, and remember what she had received; but, if she does not watch, is to be treated as the world. Hence, as we have seen, the call to hear is addressed to overcomers after the promise. The character of Christ in connection with this assembly must not be passed over. It brings out the passage from the various conditions of the assembly to His authority above and beyond it over the world. Christ personally takes up what the assembly has ceased to be. He is the Amen, the fulfillment and verifier of all the promises, the real witness and revealer of God and of truth, when the assembly is not; and the beginning of the creation of god — head over all things, and the glory and witness of what it is as from God — as the new creation. The assembly ought to have displayed the power of the new creation by the Holy Ghost; as if any man is in Christ, it is a new creation, where all things are of God. We, as its firstfruits, are created again in Him. The assembly has thus the things which remain (2 Corinthians 3:11). But she has been an unfaithful witness of it. Does she possess a part in it? It is

because Christ does, and He is the true beginning of it as really displayed. The responsible witness of it by the Holy Ghost having failed, Christ now takes it up, coming in for its effectual display.

But the series of preparatory events in the world must first be gone into. And it is to be remarked, that there is no mention here of the fact of the Lord's coming in reference to the assembly. It is promised that He will come quickly; and the assembly is threatened with being spued out of His mouth. But the fact of His coming for His own, or the assembly's rapture at any time, is not stated. This falls in fully with what we have seen of John's ministry\* his being occupied with the manifestation of the Lord on earth, and scarce touching (and only when needed on leaving the disciples) on heavenly promises. In John 14 and 17 he does it exceptionally. Here it is left out. Even in Revelation 12, which remarkably confirms what I say, the rapture is only seen as identified with the catching up of the man-child, Christ Himself. Hence we have no specific relative epoch noted for the taking away the saints here, save that they are taken before the war in heaven which leads to the last three years and a half. But on the other hand the saints belonging to the assembly, or before, are always seen above when the epistles to the assemblies are ended. They are waiting for judgment to be given to them for the avenging of their blood; but they are never seen on earth.

[\* His character too was for judgment among the assemblies and the assembly on earth; not His own bride, but the outward body here on earth.]

But we have to consider where the fourth chapter commences God's ways. It does not follow necessarily that the assembly has been spued out of Christ's mouth. It had been threatened; but the judgment on Sardis, or even on Thyatira, was not yet come. But it is after Christ has ceased to deal with the professing assembly as such, looking to it as His light-bearer before the world. What it may call itself still is not stated; He is not dealing with it. An open apostasy will come. Its date is not revealed; nor is it revealed as to the rapture. But I gather from 2 Thessalonians 2, that the rapture will be before the apostasy. What we have stated then is, that it is after all dealing with the assemblies by Christ is closed, that the subsequent dealings with the world in the Revelation begin. The assemblies are "the things that are"; what follows, "the things after these." Christ is not now seen walking in their midst; He is the Lamb in the midst of the



throne. John is not occupied with seeing Him there, or sending messages to the assemblies, but is called up to heaven where all the ways of God are now carried on, and that towards the world, not the assembly. We have the throne too, not the long-robed priest. The kings and priests we read of in chapter I are now on high. Others may follow them; but they are in heavenly places, seated on thrones, or worshipping, or presenting their censers full of incense. On the other hand the Lord is not come to judge the world, but about to receive the inheritance. The saints then, who will be caught up to meet Christ, are seen only on high here; they belong to heaven, and are no longer dealt with on earth, but have their own place in heaven.

The connection between the two parts of the Apocalypse is this: Christ, who was judging in the midst of the professing church, is now seen on high, opening the book of this world's judgment, of which He is about to take the inheritance publicly. From this scene of judgment the saints are far. The apostle's occupation with the assembly now ceases — an important point, for the Holy Spirit must be occupied with it as long as the saints are in it on earth; — and he is taken up to heaven, and there he sees God in covenant with creation, on a throne of government, with a rainbow round about it. The living creatures celebrate Him as the Creator, the One for whom all things were created. The throne was not a throne of grace, but the signs of power and judgment broke forth from it; but around it those who represent the saints received at Christ's coming, the kings and priests, are sitting on thrones in a circle round the throne. No altar of sacrifice is in view, as if it were a time of approach; the brazen laver has glass instead of water. It is a fixed accomplished holiness, not cleansing of feet. The elders are crowned, the number twenty-four recalling the courses of the priests. The seven Spirits of God are there in the temple, not Christ's to wield for the assembly, or sent out into the world, but the perfections in attributes which characterise the actions of God in the world. This it is bears light now into the world.

Besides these, four living creatures are there in the circle of the throne itself and around the throne. They may be viewed as forming the throne, or apart from it, though connected with it as a center. They have some of the characters of the cherubim, some of the seraphim, but somewhat different from both. They were full of eyes, before and behind, to see all things

according to God, and within; having also six wings; perfect in inward perception, but given perception, and in the celerity of their motions. They embraced also the four species of creation in the ordered earth: man, cattle, beast, of the field, fowl of the air: these symbolising the powers or attributes of God, themselves worshipped by the heathen, here only the instruments of the throne. Him who sat on it the heathen knew not. The intelligence, firmness, power, rapidity of execution which belong to God were typified as elsewhere by them. They are symbols. Divers agents may be the instruments of their activity. But though there was the general analogy of the cherubim, judicial and governmental power, these had a peculiar character.

The cherubim in the temple had two wings, which formed the throne; they looked on the covenant, and at the same time, as of pure gold, were characterised by the divine righteousness of the throne to be approached. In Ezekiel they were the support of the firmament above which the God of Israel was: it was a throne of executive judgment. They were like burnished brass, and like fire — a symbol we have considered already. They had four wings: two to fly with, two to cover themselves. From Ezekiel 10 it appears they were full of eyes (“it is not said within”) it was to govern what was outside according to God, not divine intelligence within. In Isaiah 6 the seraphim (or burners) have six wings as here; they are above the throne, and cry as here, Holy, holy, holy! They, with a burning coal, cleansed the prophet’s lips; they were above the throne.

The symbols used here become clearer through these cases. The living creatures are in and around the throne; for it is a throne of executory judgment, with the attributes of cherubim united to it. But it is not, as in Israel, mere earthly providential judgment, a whirlwind out of the north. There is before us the government of all the earth, and executory judgment according to the holiness of God’s nature.\* There is not only full perception of all, but intrinsic perception morally. It is no seat of gold to be approached, as in the tabernacle. The intrinsic holiness of God is applied to judgment. He is making good His nature and character in all creation. Providence would be no longer a riddle. It was not complex attributes unsolved, so to speak, though applied in special circumstances; each act would have its character.

[\* For the judgment at the end, though governmental, closing earth's history, was not merely so (cherubic), but according to God's holiness and nature (seraphic), particularly as in Isaiah 6, a known God in Israel.]

Here too remark, it is not, as in the first chapter, the God who is, though embracing past and future, God in Himself; but the God of ages, "who was, and is, and is to come." Still He has all Old Testament names: Jehovah, Elohim, Shaddai. His attributes now celebrate His full name, as the Holy One who lives for ever and ever — has no passing power or being, like man at his best estate, vanity. And the saints here fall down before the throne, bow themselves before His place in glory, and worship Him in His endless being, and lay down their given glory before His supreme and proper glory, ascribing all glory to Him alone, as alone worthy of it; but here, according to the nature of the celebration of it, the Creator for whom all things are. In all changes these remained true.

It will be remarked here, that the living creatures only celebrate and declare; the elders worship with understanding. All through the Revelation the elders give their reason for worshipping. There is spiritual intelligence in them.

Further, remark, that when thunderings and lightnings and voices, the signs of terror in judgment, go forth from the throne, the throned elders remain unmoved; they are on thrones around when the throne of judgment is introduced. This is their place before God in respect of judgment. Whenever He takes judgment in hand this is their position. They are part of the glory — assessors of the throne from which its terror goes forth. When He that sits on it is celebrated, they are all activity, own all glory to be His, are prostrate on their faces, and cast their crowns before Him, more blessed in owning His glory, than in possessing their own.

We do not find the Father here; it is Jehovah. And indeed should we ask in whom He is personally displayed, it would be, as always, in the Son; but it is in itself simply the Jehovah of the Old Testament here.

In the next chapter we find the Lamb. A book was in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. It was counsels, wielded by His power. Who could open them and bring them forth to execution? Who had the title to do so? None in heaven or earth but One. The elders explained to the prophet who mourned that the ways of God should be shut up, that the mighty One of

Judah, the true source of all promises to David, had prevailed to open it and loose the seals. This was the Lamb, the rejected Messiah. He was more than this, as the chapter goes on to show; but He is this. The rejected Messiah was in the midst of the divine throne; and within all the displays of providence and grace — the living creatures and elders — stood a Lamb as it had been slain. He had the fullness of power over the earth — seven horns — as of God, and the seven Spirits of God for government, according to God's perfection, of all the earth. When He has taken the book, the living creatures and elders fall down before Him with golden censers full of the prayers of the saints. They are priests here.

Now a new song is sung to celebrate the Lamb. What seemed His dishonor and rejection on earth was the ground of His worthiness to take the book. He who at all suffering and cost to Himself had glorified all that God was, was able and worthy to unfold what made it good in the way of government. It was not the government of Israel, but of all the earth; not merely earthly chastisements according to God's revelation of Himself in Israel, but the display in power of all God was in the whole earth. He who had glorified all He was, and redeemed, by the gospel of what He was through His death, out of all the earth, was the fit One to bring it forth in power. He does not yet come forth; but His work is the worthy instrument, the divine motive, for the display of it all. He can unlock the seals of God's ways and mysteries. I read the passage thus: "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed to God, by thy blood, out of every kindred, etc., and hast made them unto our God kings and priests, and they shall reign over the earth." Thus it is not any particular class, but the value of the act which is the motive of praise, and all being confided to Him.

Here the angels come in to praise, not in the fourth chapter. I can hardly doubt that a change in administrative order takes place here. Until the Lamb took the book, they were the administrative power; they were the instruments through which what the four living creatures symbolised was exercised in the earth. "But unto the angels hath he not put into subjection the world to come, whereof we speak." Hence, as soon as the Lamb appears and takes the book, as soon as the idea of redemption is brought in, the living creatures and elders are brought together, and the angels take their own place apart. Like the living creatures before, they give no reason for their praise. As the heads of creation as to their nature, they celebrate

with all creatures the title to glory of the Lamb and His own worthiness, ascribing praise to Him that sits on the throne and to the Lamb for ever and ever. The four living creatures, that is, all the exercise of God's power in creation and providence, join their Amen, and the elders worship God in the excellency of His being. But the living creatures and elders are joined (verse 8) in falling down before the Lamb. I do not think they are meant to be distinguished in the latter part of the verse,\* but merge in the elders, symbolising different service but not now two classes. Verse 9 is the general fact; not "they sung," but "they sing." This takes place in heaven; but those named are in the mind in a general way. Thus the source of what follows, the throne, and the persons engaged in heaven before God in all that passes, are displayed: whence the judgment flows, who surround the throne of God above, and who is in it, have been brought before us; the heavenly scene, and choir, and assistants.

[\* That is, "having" does not apply to elders only.]

What is to follow on earth now begins, when the seals are opened. It will be remarked here, that John, standing in the ruin of the assembly, gives prophetically all that passes from that failure till Christ comes in chapter 19. There is no ascension, no rapture, save so far as chapter 12:5 gives both together.

The first seals are simple; nor have I anything to offer very new upon them: first, imperial conquests, then wars, then famine, then pestilence, carrying with it what Ezekiel calls God's four sore plagues (sword, famine, pestilence, and the beasts of the earth). They speak of the providential course of God's dealings, and hence the four beasts call attention to it; but they have God's voice in them, the voice of the Almighty: that, the ear of him who has the Spirit hears. These complete providential plagues, as spoken of in scripture. Then direct judgments follow; but these are what we may call preparatory measures.

I have to notice that in the full plagues of verse 8 the whole Roman earth is not included. It is a fourth, not a third. The plagues too, note, are limited in extent of sphere, not universal.

The saints are those whom God is really thinking of, and they come in remembrance before other scenes are brought out. Those who had been

martyred for the word of God and their testimony demand how long before they were avenged; for we have ever to do here with a God of judgment. Their being under the altar means simply that they had offered their bodies, as sacrifices for the truth, to God. The white robes are the witness of their righteousness — God’s declared approval of them; but the time for their being avenged was not yet. I do not think giving white robes is resurrection. The first resurrection is sovereign grace, giving us the same place with Christ (“for ever with the Lord”), consequent on His work and His being our righteousness, which is alike to all of us. White robes thus conferred are the recognition of the righteousness (righteousnesses)\* of the saints — hence are seen in chapter 19:8 at His appearing. “They shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.” I am not denying that we are made clean, and our robes white in the blood of the Lamb. But, even where this is said in chapter 7, I think it refers especially to the way they have been associated by faith with the suffering position of Christ. Here white robes are given them — their service owned; but, for avenging, they must wait till a new scene of persecution had brought them companions who had to be honored and avenged like them. Still this marks progress, and finds its cause in the dealings of God to bring about this new state of things, which issues in final judgment and setting aside of evil. Here the judgments are providential.

[\* It is very possible that the plural “righteousnesses” is a Hebraism for righteousness. It is a common case in moral things. At any rate it is of the saints.]

The next thing to the claim for avenging is the breaking up of the whole system of earthly government, and the terror of all on earth. How clearly we see here that we are in a scene of judgment, and that God is a God of judgment! The desires of the saints are like the desires of the Psalms. We are not with children before the Father, with grace, with the gospel, and the assembly; but with Jehovah, where God is a God of judgment, and by Him actions are weighed. We are on Old Testament ground, that is, prophecy, not grace to the wicked, though judgment brings in blessing.

The opening of the sixth seal brings an earthquake, that is, a violent convulsion of the whole structure of society. All the governing powers are therein visited; and, seeing all subverted, small and great think (with bad consciences as they have) that the day of the Lamb’s wrath is come. But it

is not, though preparatory judgments with a view to His kingdom are there.

But God thinks too of His saints on earth (where, we must remember, the assembly is never now seen) before the scenes which follow, whether judgments on the Roman earth or the special workings of evil, to secure and seal them for that day.

First, the perfect number of the remnant of Israel is sealed, before the providential instruments of God's judgments are allowed to act; 144,000=12 x 12 x 1000. They are secured for blessing according to God's purposes and set apart by Him; not yet seen in their blessings, but secured for them. Afterwards the vast multitude from among the Gentiles is seen. We must remark here, there is no previous prophetic announcement of the blessing of the spared ones in the great tribulation (not the three years and a half of Matthew 24 — this refers to Jews — but that mentioned in the epistle to the church at Philadelphia). Hence this is fully given to us here, and we are distinctly told who they are. A multitude of Gentiles is seen standing not as around the throne, but before it and before the Lamb, their righteousness owned and themselves victorious. They ascribe salvation to God thus revealed, that is, to God on the throne, and to the Lamb. They belong to these earthly scenes, not to the assembly. This is answered by the angels who are around the throne, the elders, and the living creatures — all together composing the heavenly part of the scene already connected with the throne; the angels surrounding the others, which form the center and immediate circle of the throne, the white-robed multitude before it. The angels give their Amen, and pronounce the praise of their God too.

All this belonged to the white-robed multitude and the angels; only the former speak of the Lamb, who was also their salvation. The angels add their Amen to this; but praise their God. They had ascribed glory and blessing to the Lamb before; but, naturally, salvation to the Lamb was not their own part of the song. But the four living creatures and the elders do not worship here, because their own relationships were different, and these are not what are spoken of here. They are found, as far as the book goes, in chapters 4 and 5, where they are on thrones around, and cast their crowns before the throne, and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever. They give the motives of worship according to the relationships they are in: that

of the angels is with their God; of the white-robed multitude, with the God of the throne and the Lamb as having the title to the government and deliverance of the earth as a present thing. That the Lamb was the Son, yea, the God who created the angels, is not the question here, but of each speaking in his own relationship, so as to bring these relationships out.

We have thus the heavenly hosts, the glorified saints, and the white-robed multitude, each in a different relationship, but the first and the last thrown in the main together — the glorified saints forming a class apart. They do not worship here. But one of the elders, who have always the intelligence of God, explains to the prophet who the white-robed multitude are. It formed no part of the prophetic revelation as yet, and it was not the assembly's own place. "Sir, thou Knowest," says the prophet. They had come out of the great tribulation, faithful in it, their robes white in the blood of the Lamb. They were not millennial saints, that is, born in that time, and subject by birth to the responsibility of that condition (which grace had to meet). They were cleansed and owned to be so, having the consciousness of it and victory when the others began; so that they, as already cleansed and owned, are always before the throne a special class, and serve Him day and night in His temple.

This at once distinguishes them from the heavenly worshippers; there is no temple there; the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple. He that sits on the throne tabernacles over these, as once over the tabernacle. They are not only as Israel in the courts, or the nations in the world: they have a priest's place in the world's temple. The millennial multitudes are worshippers; these priests. As Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, ever in the temple itself, they have always access to the throne. But they had blessings under the Lamb also, to whom they alike ascribe their salvation — the good Shepherd cast out, and who had passed through tribulation Himself, also so great, would feed them; they would not hunger any more or thirst any more, as they had often done; nor should persecution or tribulation reach them. The Lamb, as known in this transitional time, but exalted in the throne, would feed them and lead them to living fountains of water. It is not, as to us, the promise of a well of water, springing up into everlasting life, and flowing out as a river; but they would be fed, refreshed, and perfectly cared for by the Lamb's grace whom they had followed; and God himself would wipe all tears from their eyes. They



would have the consolations of God, worth all the sorrows they had passed through. But their blessings are consolations, not proper heavenly joy. They are thus a class apart, distinct from the elders or heavenly saints, and distinct from millennial-saints who will never see tribulation, having a known position fixed in grace before God. It is a new revelation as to those passing through the great tribulation. The 144,000 of chapter 14 are a similar class from among the Jews, coming out of their special tribulation.

Again, divine interest in the saints, brought out into action by the effectual intercession of the great High Priest, brings down judgments on the world. For those under the altar there was no intercession; they were perfected, having been rejected and slain like Christ. There are saints upon the earth who yet need this intercession so that their cry in their infirmity should be heard and answered. The smoke of the incense came up with the prayers of the saints. The great Mediator took of the fire off the altar, put it into the censer, and cast it on the earth. The intercession turned into judgments in the answer, and the signs of God's power were manifested, and subversion of order on earth followed — voices, thunderings, lightnings (as when the throne was set), and an earthquake.

Then follow specific judgments, on the signal being given from above. They fell on the Roman earth, the third part of the earth (see chap. 12:4). First, judgment from heaven, hail and fire; and violence or destruction of men; on earth blood: the effect was the destruction of the great ones in the Roman earth, and of all general prosperity. Next, a great power, as the judgment of God, was cast into the mass of peoples — still, I apprehend, in the Roman earth; for destruction of men, and all that belonged to their subsistence and commerce followed in those limits. Next, one that should have been a special source of light and order in government fell from his place, and corrupted the moral sources of popular motives and feelings — what governs and sways the people so as to characterise them. They became bitter, and men died of it. The last of these four plagues falls on the governing powers, and puts them out in their order, as from God: all in the limits of the Roman earth. This closed the general judgments, subverting and producing disaster and confusion in the Roman earth, where the power of evil, as against the saints, was.

Woe (specially on those who had their settled place on earth, in contrast with the heavenly calling, and who were unawakened and unmoved by the judgments on the earth, but clung to it in spite of all as their home), is then announced. Threefold woe! The term “dwellers on,” or “inhabiters of,” the earth, has not yet been used, save in the promise to Philadelphia, and the claims of the souls under the altar: for both of these were in contrast with such. After all these dealings of God they are a distinct and manifested class, and spoken of, in what passes on the earth, as such. Against this perversely unbelieving class the earthly judgments of God are now directed: the first, against the Jews; the second, against the inhabitants of the Roman earth; the last, universal.

The fifth angel sounds (chap. 9); and one who should have been by position the instrument of light and governmental order over the earth was seen as having lost his place; and the power to let loose the full darkening influence of Satan was given him. He opened the bottomless pit — the place where evil is shut up and chained; not where it is punished, that is, the lake of fire. Supreme authority, and all heavenly light over the earth, and healthful influence of order, were darkened and made to cease by the evil satanic influence which was let loose. Nor was this all: direct instruments of satanic power came out of this evil influence in numbers; crowds of moral locusts with the sting of false doctrine in their tail. But it was not to destroy temporal prosperity on the earth, but to torment the ungodly Jews; not to kill, but to harass and vex them. This was to continue five months; for it is not the final judgment. The torment was worse than death — pain and anguish of heart. But they had the semblance of military imperial power, crowned, and with masculine energy, to those that met them; but they were, if seen behind and the secret disclosed, subject and weak: their faces were as the faces of men, their hair as the hair of women. But they were armed in a steeled conscience. They were the direct instruments of the power of Satan, and under his orders. The angel of the bottomless pit he who rules the depths of Satan’s wiles, as the ruler of the power of darkness — led them. We are too unbelieving as to the direct influence of Satan in darkening men’s minds when permitted, when men are given up to his darkening influence. Cruel harassing torments, worse than death, with darkening of their minds, become the portion of the once beloved people. One woe was past.

The sixth angel sounds. The woe which follows is much more human and providential. It is directed against the inhabitants of the Latin Empire. The instruments of it are let loose from beyond Euphrates — a countless crowd of horsemen. But they were not simply such. Their consciences and their words, both were in the power of Satan, but in judgment from God. But it now killed men. Their mouths belched forth the power of Satan, and their influence in doctrine was satanic: with both they did hurt. I do not believe this death here is mere temporal death (there may be such), but, I suspect, making apostates. The rest, who did not thus fall, did not repent of their idolatry and misdeeds.

These were preliminary woes on the body of Jews and christianised Gentiles, not the direct antagonism of the power of evil with God. This is now unfolded, but first, in the little open book, put in its place in the general history (chap. 10) The book is open as part of well-known prophecy, and now brought to a direct issue on known ground; not the unrevealed and more unmanifest ways of God introducing the final issue. Christ comes down and affirms His right to all below; puts His right foot on the sea, the left on the earth, and utters the voice of His might, to which the voice of the Almighty in power answers. But its revelations were sealed up; but Christ swears by Him who lives for ever and ever that there should be no more delay. All things are drawing to a final issue. In the sounding of the seventh trumpet the mystery of God would be closed — His direct power come. The prophet is to recommence his prophecy as to nations and tongues, and languages.

We are here at once in the center of prophetic subjects — Jerusalem, the temple, the altar, and worshippers (chap. 11). The worshippers and the altar are recognised and accepted of God — those worshipping in the secret of God within. The general profession of Judaism is rejected and disowned. It is given up to be trodden down under the Gentiles, and that for the half-week of sorrow. Those who held the place of priests were owned. Real worshippers, according to God's mind, were there and owned; and God gave also an adequate testimony — two witnesses — what was required under the law; and they continue day by day constantly to give witness the whole period, or half-week. The witnesses were in sorrow and reproach, but with power; as Elias and Moses were when the people were in apostasy and captivity. It was not the re-establishment of

Israel with royalty and priesthood, as it would be afterwards — the candlestick of Zechariah with the two olive-trees — but the sufficient witness to it. Nor could they be touched while the half-week of their prophecy lasted; their word brought death on their adversaries. We have priesthood and prophecy in the remnant, not of course royalty, but a testimony to it practically: suffering marked its absence, yet none could touch them till their time were come. In this they were like Christ in His humiliation in the midst of Israel; only He did not slay His enemies. In the Psalms He marks it out as the remnant's portion. Complete humiliation and the full answer of God to their prophetic word marked their state. But when they had finished their testimony, the case is different. They had to do with the beast out of the bottomless pit. They stood before the God of the earth — not preachers of heavenly gospel, but witnesses of God's title to the earth — of His love to His people in connection with it. They bore witness to God's claim when hostile Gentiles were in possession. The beast, now their hour is come, slays them, and their bodies are cast into the highways of the city. Those of the nations rejoice over them and make merry. The dwellers upon earth, who would have the earth theirs and ease upon it, were delighted: for the witnesses of the God of the earth tormented them; but in three days and a half, quickened by the power of the Spirit of God, they ascended to heaven in a cloud, not as Christ did, apart, but in the sight of their enemies. A tenth of the great city of the world fell at the same time in the convulsion that took place on the earth; and the remnant are affrighted, and give glory to the God of heaven. But God was dealing already as the God of the earth. The second woe was now past.

Thus we get the close of the half-week indicated; the seventh trumpet was quickly to sound, which was to finish the mystery of God. It sounds; and there were great voices in heaven declaring that the worldly kingdom of their Lord (Jehovah) and of His anointed (Christ) was come — the greatest woe and terror of all to the inhabitants of the earth. Satan's woe had been specially on Jews; man's woe, specially on the men of the Latin Empire; this is God's woe when the nations are angry, and God's wrath is come, and full reckoning and final deliverance come. We have again the elders here announcing the reason of praise and thanksgiving. Voices in heaven announce the fact of the reign of Jehovah and of His Christ according to

Psalms 2, and that He (for, as ever, John unites both in one thought) should reign for ever and ever; and so it will be. But both the earthly and eternal kingdom are celebrated. Only in the eternal kingdom the distinction of the worldly kingdom and of Christ's subordination is omitted. In the thanksgiving of the elders, Jehovah Elohim Shaddai is also celebrated; as the great King who takes to Him His power and reigns; for it is God's kingdom. We have two parts in their statement: the nations angry — this brings in the time of God's wrath; and the time of the dead to be judged. This is the first half: man's wrath, and God's judgment. Then He gives reward to prophets, saints, and all that fear His name, and sets aside from the earth those who corrupted it. This is blessing. The first part is general, the time of wrath and judgment; the second is reward and deliverance of the saints on earth. This closes entirely the main symbolic history. The last trumpet has sounded, and the mystery of God is closed.

In what follows we have details: the beast, and the connection of the assembly and Jews with it; Babylon, and then the marriage of the Lamb; judgments of beast and false prophet; binding of Satan; two resurrections, and final judgment; and the description of the heavenly city. But this new prophecy begins (chap. 11:19), as to earthly prophetic dealing, with special reference to the Jews. The temple of God is opened in heaven, the ark of His covenant, which refers to Israel is seen there. But judgment characterises it now; judgments of all kinds, those coming down from above, and subversion and disaster below.\*

[\* Where the throne is set for judgment, it is characterised only by what proceeds directly from God. There are no earthquakes and hail; here there are.]

**CHAPTER 12** gives us a brief but all-important summary of the whole course of events, viewed, not in their instruments on earth or the judgment of these, but the divine view of all the principles at work, the state of things as revealed of God. The first symbolical person, subject of the prophecy and result of all God's ways in it, is a woman clothed with the sun, having a crown of twelve stars, and the moon under her feet. It is Israel, or Jerusalem as its center, as in the purpose of God (compare Isaiah 9:6, and Psalms 87:6). She is clothed with supreme authority, invested with the glory of perfect administration in man, and all the original reflected glory of this under the old covenant, under her feet. She was travelling in

childbirth, distressed, and in pain to be delivered: on the other hand Satan's power in the form of the Roman Empire, complete in forms of power, seven heads, but incomplete in administrative supremacy — ten, not twelve horns. But Satan, as the open infidel enemy of God and God's power in Christ, sought to devour the child as soon as born, who was to have the rule of the earth from God. But the child, Christ, and the assembly with Christ, is caught away to God and His throne — does not receive the power yet, but is placed in the very source of it from which it flows. It is not the rapture as regards joy; for it goes back to Christ Himself but the placing Him and the assembly in and with Him, in the seat from which power flows for the establishment of the kingdom. There is no time for this: Christ and the assembly are all one. But the woman — the Jews, after this fly into the wilderness, where God has prepared a place for them, for the half-week.

The assembly, or heavenly saints (as Christ, note), go up to heaven to be out of the way. The Jews, or earthly ones, are protected by providential care upon earth. This gives the whole state of things, and those in view in this scene, and their respective places. She that is to have glory and hold power in the earth is cast out. The child that is to have power, in and from heaven, is previously taken up there. This makes the position very clear.

The historical course of events is now pursued, the child being supposed to be already caught up. There is war in heaven; and the devil and his angels are cast out, and have no more place there. This brings out yet more clearly the distinction of the heavenly saints and the Jewish remnant. The heavenly ones had overcome the accuser by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony; the woman's seed have the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, that is, the Spirit of prophecy. What they have of God in the word is according to the Old Testament.

But, to follow up the latter part of the chapter, a loud voice proclaims in heaven that the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ is come — the testimony still of the second Psalm; only as yet it was only proclaimed from heaven, where the power of the kingdom was already made good by the casting down of Satan. Satan's anti-priestly power was over for ever; king and prophet he might yet put on; but his heavenly place was past. The saints of the heavenlies had overcome him by that which

made their conscience and their title to heaven good — the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their mouth, God's sword by the Spirit — and gave up their lives to the death. The heavens and the dwellers there could now rejoice; but it was woe to the inhabitants of earth and sea; for the devil had come down, knowing he had but a little time left. I think verse 11 implies that there ate saints killed after the rapture, who yet belong to heaven. If there were such killed because of their faithfulness, were they not taken up, they would lose earth and heaven, though more devoted than those who had earth. We see them moreover in chapter 20 in the first resurrection. The souls under the altar also had to wait for others — their brethren who had to be killed, as they were; and we are to note here that those celebrated as happy are the slain ones, none others. Yet it is before the last three years and a half.

So that we have these three parties in new: the voice of those in heaven; (our) their brethren who had overcome; and those who would be in the three years and a half of Satan's rage, which had not yet begun. Now, if the man-child in heaven be, as we have considered it, Christ and the raptured saints, the voice would be that of those already there,\* and all self-evident: the raptured saints associated with Him celebrate the casting down of the accuser and the deliverance of those who belonged to heaven, calling them "our brethren" — the brethren whose conflict with the accuser was over, as he was now cast down, but who had had to resist him as a heavenly potentate, an anti-priest, all which part is mystery for John — and those who now would be in trial, when he would act with rage on earth, as king and prophet. For the dragon, cast to the earth and unable to accuse in heaven or oppose saints having a heavenly calling (and the priesthood refers to such, not to union), persecutes the Jews, and seeks to destroy their testimony; but God gave, not power of resistance — the Lord must come to deliver — but power to flee and escape and find refuge where she was nourished the whole half-week out of the serpent's reach. He seeks to pursue; wings he has none: but he uses a river, the movements of people under the influence of special motive and guidance, to overwhelm the woman. But the earth, this organised system in which men live, swallowed the waters up. This influence was in vain — was not met by an army, a counter-power, but was nullified. There was such a disposition or course of the earth as neutralised the effort wholly. So God ordered in His

providence; and the dragon turned to persecute individually the faithful remnant of the seed — the Jews who held fast by the word.

[\* I do not continue to put the voice as Christ's. The application to Him is too questionable.]

In **CHAPTER 13** we have the clear and full development of Satan's instruments of evil. They are two — the ten-horned and the two-horned beasts. To the first the dragon, who swept with his tail a third part of the stars to earth, Satan under the form of the Roman Empire, gave his throne and much authority.\* The second not only wielded the first power administratively before him, but was the active power of evil to lead men to recognise the first, and therein the dragon. The beast is the original Roman Empire, but largely modified and in a new character. It has perfect completeness in its forms of government or heads, but is composed of ten kingdoms, indicating also, I doubt not, imperfect administrative completeness. It has not twelve horns; it is incomplete. Seven would be completeness of a higher kind. The Lamb had seven horns; the woman, twelve stars on her head. One is perfectness in itself; the other administratively in man. Seven is the highest prime number (you cannot make it); twelve, the most perfectly divisible, composed of the same elements, but multiplied, not added as a simple number. So four is finite perfection, as is a square and still more a cube, perfectly the same all ways but finite. But the beast had names of blasphemy. It was the open enemy of God and His Christ. It absorbed the previous empires and represented them. The dragon, Satan's direct power in the form of the heathen Roman Empire, gave his throne and power to this new beast. It was not of God. God owned no power on the earth now the assembly was gone, till He took His own. The earth was at war with Him.

[\* We are not to be surprised, therefore, if the beast at the end had only local empire, though originally God had given universal empire to the beasts: how widely exercised we know.]

One of the beast's heads (I doubt not the Imperial) was seen as wounded to death, but healed. The imperial head was restored and the world was ill admiration; and they worship the dragon as giving the beast his power. Nothing in their eyes equals the beast; but God is wholly thrown off in the earth. The beast is given to have the greatest pretensions in his language and outrage against God. He blasphemed God, His name and



dwelling-place, and the heavenly saints — all Christianity, and the God of it. The dragon had been cast out from heaven; the raptured saints had been received there. He blasphemed, but could only blaspheme them.

As regards those who dwelt on earth (for the division was not merely a spiritual one now), all worshipped the beast, save the elect — those who had been written from the foundation of the world in the Lamb's book of life. Human resistance by force was not the path of obedience. Here the patience and faith of the saints were shown. He who took the sword would perish by it; it is never Christ's way, but unresisting patience; but the beast who did would perish. This then was the imperial power, a blasphemous power set up by Satan, with the place of the old Roman Empire, which represented all four, modified in form, but the imperial head restored.

But there was a second beast; it rose not out of the mass of peoples (the sea) to be an empire, but out of the already formed organisation with which God had to say as such. It had the form of Messiah's kingdom on earth, two horns like a lamb; but it was the direct power of Satan. He who with a divinely taught ear heard it speak heard the voice of Satan at once. All the power of the first beast it exercises before it, is, with its power, its minister, and makes the earth and the dwells on it worship it (that is, the Roman Empire restored to its head). It is Antichrist, the false Christ of Satan, who subjects the earth to the satanic Roman Empire. He does great wonders, so as to give men as good proof of the beast's title before men, as Elijah did of Jehovah's. Compare 2 Thessalonians 2, where the man of sin gives the same proofs, if lying ones, that Jesus did of being the Christ. He deceives the dwellers on earth by his miracles, making them set up an image to him. This image he gives breath to; so that it speaks and causes those to be killed who do not worship it. All likewise were obliged to take the stamp and the mark of the beast's service in their work, or open profession, and no man was allowed to traffic who had not the name of the beast as a mark.

Such is the power which has the character of Messiah's kingdom in its form, is animated with the fullest energy of Satan, and, recognising the public power which Satan had set up in the world, will have every one bow to it, none to traffic without acknowledging it; and all will, save the

elect. The anti-priestly power of Satan in the heavens is over; royalty and prophecy as yet remain to him, in opposition to Christ who has not yet appeared. These he assumes; but he does not and cannot set aside the power of the Gentiles — that remains for Christ to do but sets it up as his delegate; and, as the apostate Jews of old, so now that people, save the elect remnant, as his instruments bow to it and minister to it. Thus you have all Satan's power exercised. But, in setting up his Messiah, he is obliged to deceive; and advances by his miracles of deceit what he cannot set aside — the Gentile power; and subjects the Jews to idolatry and to the Gentiles; and all the Gentiles themselves dwelling on the earth to the depository of Satan's authority — the first beast.

This is a singular state of things, far from Jewish feelings and modern Gentile hopes; but the unclean spirit of idolatry is to return to his house. Signs, not truth, will govern the superstitious mind of man; they will be given up to believe a lie. Here, though he takes the character of Christ in his kingdom, it is chiefly his action on the Gentiles which is spoken of; the Jews are mixed up with them as we see in Isaiah 66, and Daniel. It is a liberal time, but one of most complete tyranny as regards all who do not bow to Satan's power and the ordinances established by him. What characterises it is the absence of truth.

As regards the number of the beast, I have no doubt that it will be very simple to the godly, when the beast is there, and the time of spiritually judging it comes, and that name will practically guide those who have to do with him. Till then, the speculations of men are not of much value; Irenaeus's old one of Latin man is as good as any.

In **CHAPTER 14** we have the dealings of God with the evil, only first owning and setting apart the remnant. The remnant belongs entirely to the renewed earth: they are seen on that which is the center of dominion and glory in it — Mount Zion, where the Lamb shall reign. They had His and His Father's name on their foreheads; that is, by their open confession of God and the Lamb they had been witnesses of it, and suffered as Christ had suffered in His life in owning God His Father: only they had not suffered death. It was a new beginning, not the assembly, not heavenly, but the blessing of a delivered earth in its firstfruits in those who had suffered for the testimony to it. Heaven celebrates it with a voice of many

waters, and as of thunder, but with joy. This voice was the voice of harps. A new song is sung before the throne and beasts and elders. Here the fact is the important thing. There had been song in and of heaven, in chapter 5, in connection with redemption; but those who were redeemed there were made kings and priests. Here it was redemption in connection with earthly blessings, not with the kingdom and priesthood on high; and it is sung before the heavenly company and throne. Heaven however is directly connected with the song. It was connected with triumph over the power of evil by patient endurance of suffering.

What specially characterised them was purity from the contamination that surrounded them. This passing through sorrow and overcoming connects them directly with the heavenly conquerors. It was not the new song of heavenly redemption; still it was victory when down at the gates of death, though not actually in it. It was “as it were a new song.” This none could learn but those who had shared the earthly sufferings of the Lamb, and would now be His companions in His earthly royalty; they had followed Him, they would follow Him whithersoever He went. They are the firstfruits of the new scene. They had not corrupted themselves where all did. They were not of those who loved or made a lie, or gave in to it. Corruption and falsehood they had been kept free from, openly confessing the truth. They had not the heavenly place, but they are without fault, and they share the Lamb’s earthly place and glory, accompanying Him whithersoever He goes, in the manifestation of that glory. All that led to these privileges had no place when once the kingdom was set up. It was then too late to show faithfulness in this way. There is a connection with the heavenly saints which is not in chapter 7. The white-robed multitude stood before the throne and the Lamb. They are before the throne of God, they worship in His temple, and the Lamb comforts them. Here there is special association with the Lamb on earth, in their path and in their consequent place. It is the remnant of the Psalms (especially Psalm 1 to 41). But, though on earth with the King, they are redeemed from among men before Christ comes to earth; and the song they learn to sing is sung before the elders and living creatures. They are not with them, but they sing the song sung before them; that is, the Gentile multitude are admitted to special privileges before God and the Lamb; the Jewish remnant are associated with the Lamb on earth, and, in a certain sense, with heaven.

The progress of God's ways follows — warning to the earth to leave idolatry; for the hour of God's judgment was come. The everlasting gospel is the testimony of Christ's power, from paradise onward, as in contrast with the special announcement of the assembly, and glad tidings connected with it. Babylon is announced to be fallen; threats and warnings to any that should own the beast; but the time is now come when dying in the Lord was to cease; only their blessedness remained henceforth. Dying and tribulation were over. They are looked at as one whole body; and while any remained yet to die, they were diers in the Lord, not rested and blessed. Now their rest is come, and their reward.

Christ then reaps the earth — separating, gathering, and judgment; and treads the winepress, exercises unmingled vengeance on the wicked. Hence in this last judgment it is the angel who had the power over fire who calls for it; it was full divine judgment. This judgment was not within the limits of Babylon — was not in the sphere in which man had formed and ordered his organisation in opposition to God. This closes the whole scene of that which the history had begun by the catching up of the Man-child to heaven. He had returned in vengeance.

An interesting question here arises — What is the vine of the earth? It is that which is the fruit-bearing organisation, or what should be so (that is the idea of it), in professed connection with God, as His planting in the earth. Israel was the vine brought out of Egypt. Christ on earth was the true vine. It is not connection with Him in heaven. There we are looked at as perfect, not to bear fruit and be pruned. But analogously it went on after He had ascended on high, and professing Christians are the branches. But here it is the vine of the earth, that which has its character and growth therein, but with the pretension to take the religious place by succession on the earth. The true saints are gone on high, or are a persecuted individual remnant. I have no doubt the Jews will be the center of that system then, but they will be mixed up with Gentiles, have turned to idolatry, and have seven spirits worse than that; and the apostate Gentiles will be fully associated with it all (see Isaiah 34, 63, 65, 66).

**CHAPTER 15** is a new vision. It unrolls before the prophet another scene, the last plagues or judgments of God, and specially that of Babylon, before Christ comes. The main object of the vision was the seven angels, having

the seven last plagues; but, as ever, the saints who have to do with this scene are seen in security before the judgments begin. They have been purified, but have come through the fire of tribulation too. They stand on a sea mingled with fire. They have belonged to the time when the beast and his image were in power, but they had got the victory over it. They seemed perhaps to have succumbed — it was real victory.

Their song is very peculiar. The song of Moses is triumph over the power of evil by God's judgments. The song of the Lamb is the exaltation of the rejected Messiah, of the suffering One, like whom they had suffered; for it is the slain remnant amidst unfaithful and apostate Israel whom we find here. The song celebrates God and the Lamb, but by victorious sufferers who belong to heaven. What they celebrate are the works of Jehovah Elohim Shaddai (the God of the Old Testament), but who now has manifested Himself in judgment, known by His works that are public for the people. He showed His ways unto Moses, His works unto the children of Israel. His works are celebrated now. They are the works of Jehovah Elohim Shaddai, the Judge of all the earth. But His ways are celebrated too. There was intelligence of them, as far at least as righteous judgment went. These ways in judgment were just and true. Israel would understand deliverance, and how it came; but Moses knew God's ways. But this is all. It is not merely celebration of qualities and attributes, as the angels do, nor the full knowledge of God's work in salvation by the blood of the Lamb. It is not the heart going up in the sense of its own relationship, but a celebration of the glory of the Lord, who would now be worshipped by the nations, for His judgments were manifested. It was intelligence when judgments were manifested, not when all was yet to be learned within the veil.

This celebration of what was just bursting forth being made, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened, not merely the temple with the ark of the covenant seen. That secured the result for faith, when evil was raging in power on earth; the ark of God's covenant secured Israel. It was a testimony opened out, not a covenant which secured in the hour of evil, but a testimony which made good what the ark of the covenant secured; for the temple was opened, and the messengers of judgment came forth — God's judgment for the restoration and blessing of Israel, by the judgment of the Gentiles and all who corrupted the earth.

Cleanness in God's sight, and divine righteousness, characterised and animated this judgment — clean linen pure and white, and golden girdles: I apprehend the former, in answer to corruption in what should have had this — Babylon (compare chap. 19:8). That is, it was a judgment which required it, and was according to it, and also to divine righteousness. It is not brass burning in the fire — simply execution of judgment in dealing with men, though that took place — but God making good His own nature and character against corruption, the essential character of the eternal God, which the assembly ought to have displayed; whereas Babylon was entirely the contrary, and the beast too. The seven angels judge all according to these characters of God, because it was really the avenging of what God was, as fully revealed to the assembly; but the white linen refers, I doubt not, specially to Babylon, though the men with the mark of the beast would come under the judgment. One of the four living creatures gives the vials; for it is the judicial power of God in creation, not yet the Lamb. God's glory in judgment filled the temple; and no man could have to say to Him in worship, or approaching Him, while these plagues were executing. It was the full display of God in judgment.

The first four plagues have the same objects as the judgments of the first four trumpets — the whole circle of symbolic nature, but here directly as regards men — earth, sea, rivers, and sun; the ordered prophetic sphere of God's dealings, the masses of peoples as such viewed as unorganised, the moral principles which give an impulse to their movements, and sovereign authority. But it is not a third here (that is, the Roman earth) but in general.

The first vial of wrath brought the utmost distress and shameful misery on all who had taken the mark of the beast.

The second brought the power of moral death on the mass of peoples; all who were among them within the limits of the prophetic earth, died — I apprehend, gave up mere outward profession. We have here an example of the use of symbols which it is well to note. All the vials are poured out on the earth, that is, are applied to the sphere of already formed relationship with God. But in this there might be a special relationship in which men had to do with God in this world — were inhabitants of earth, or the mass of people within that sphere.

The third vial was poured out on all the sources of popular influence and action; and they became positively deathful. It seems to me, that the deadly influence in alienation from God, within the sphere of prophecy, is strongly marked here. Death is used generally as the expression of the power of Satan.

Then the supreme authority is made frightfully oppressive. This gave the first four of direct judgment according to the usual division.

The fifth vial strikes the throne of the beast, the seat and stability of his authority, which Satan had given him; and his kingdom became full of darkness. All was confusion and wretchedness, and no resource: they gnawed their tongues with anguish and blasphemed God.

The sixth angel pours out his vial on Euphrates — destroys, I apprehend, the securing boundary of the Western prophetic powers — not the seat of its power, but broke its frontier, that the way of the kings of the East might be prepared. I look at this simply as the bringing in of the powers of Asia into the conflict for the universal conflagration of powers. The sixth vial sends forth three unclean spirits, the sum of all evil influences: that of Satan's direct power as antagonistic of Christ; that of the power of the last empire, the beast; and that of the second beast of chapter 13 henceforth known as the false prophet, Satan's influence as the Antichrist, an idolatrous wonder-working power; and the kings of the world were gathered together to the battle of the great day of God Almighty. The allusion is to Judges 5:19, 20.

At the seventh vial there is a general break-up and subversion, and Babylon comes into judgment. And the hail of God, the judgment of God, came on men from heaven (compare Isaiah 32 and 33). All separate independent interests and established powers disappeared. This was over the earth — God's judgment by providence and instruments — but the Lamb was not come yet. The details of Babylon's judgments are reserved for the following chapters.

The characters of Babylon are first portrayed. Like the beast, she is only one thing in the judgment, but morally she is more important than all the rest. The general character is the great active idolatress that has gained influence over the mass of the nations; next, that the kings of the earth

have lived in guilty intimacy with her, seeking her favors, while those that dwell on the earth have lost their senses through her pernicious and inebriating influence. This is the general idea first given, a character plain enough to mark the Roman or Papal system.

But more details follow. There was a woman, a religious system, sitting on an imperial beast full of names of blasphemy, having the form which marked it Roman. The woman was gorgeously and imperially arrayed, had every human glory and ornament on her, and a rich cup of prostituting yet gross idolatries in her hand. “Abominations” are simply idols; “filthiness of her fornication,” all the horrible corruption that accompanies it. Her cup was full of them. She was in the desert; no springs of God were there. It was not, so to speak, God’s land, no heavenly country. To spiritual understanding she bore on her forehead her character (yet one known only when spiritually known), of the great city of corruption, source of all seduction to men and of all idolatry in the earth: such was Popery. But this was not all. All the blood of the saints was found in her: she was the persecuting murderess of those God delighted in, and who bore witness to Jesus.\* The prophet was astonished — for it was what the church had come to.

- [\* It is important to remark that formal religion, which rests on ancient claims as established, and which is left behind as to the truth by others who have received it, is the regular habitual instigator of persecution, though others may be the persecutors. So it was with the Jews, so in the universal history of the world. It always becomes false as regards truth, though it may retain some and important truths. The truths which test the heart and its obedience are not there.]

The angel then describes the beast on which she rode. It had been, ceased to exist, and then it comes up again from direct diabolical sources — comes up out of the abyss. The renewed Roman Empire, which had disappeared, is blasphemous and diabolical in nature, and in this character goes to destruction: yet all but the elect on the earth will be in admiration of it when they see the beast that was, is not, and shall be present. Of itself this marks the Roman or Latin Empire, only that it will reappear more formally. But Rome is more distinctly marked. It is the city of the seven hills. Nor was this even all. It was the existing authority in the time of the prophecy: five of its governing powers had fallen; one was there; there was then one yet to come for a short space, and then the beast out of the



abyss, the last diabolical state of the empire, would appear, and it would be destroyed. The last however is not a new form; it is one of the seven, though an eighth. My impression is, that the first Napoleon and his brief empire is the seventh, and we have now to wait for the development of the last. The beast, though imperial, has ten horns, ten distinct kingdoms. They have their power, and for the same period, with the beast. But they all give their power to the beast, and make war against Christ, the rejected One on earth; but He shall overcome them. For, despised as He may be, supreme authority is His, and there are others coming with Him, not merely angels but called ones, His saints.

Details are then added. The waters are explained as peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues — masses of populations in their diverse divisions. Next the ten horns, the kingdoms which are associated with the beast, and the beast (for so it is to be read) hate the whore and eat her flesh and burn her with fire (first, take all her substance and fatness, and then destroy her); for they are to give their kingdom to the blasphemous beast until God's words are fulfilled. And then we are expressly told that the woman (not "the whore" — the last is her corrupt idolatrous character — but the "woman"), who as riding the beast was to be such, is Rome. All this chapter (17) is description.

**CHAPTER 18** announces the judgment. The one difficulty here is verse 4, coming where it is; but, as every difficulty in scripture, it leads into further light. The destruction of Babylon is simple enough. She falls by God's judgment just before Christ comes to judge the earth; and, first perhaps losing her power and influence, is destroyed by the horns and beast. The comparison of chapter 14:8, and the place it holds, chap. 16:19; 18:8, and the beginning of 19, make this plain. Chapter 18 is a warning from heaven, not the angel of judgment of the earth. It is not consequent on events, but supposes spiritual apprehension of heaven's mind. This is the case when it is simply a voice from heaven. This call then was a spiritual call, not a manifest judgment. It may be more urgent and direct just before judgment, and I doubt not will be: as the call is in Hebrews to come out of the camp because Jerusalem's day was at hand. Hence I believe this applies whenever we see the system to be Babylon, and the sense of her iniquities is pressed upon the conscience.

The chapter then goes on to the actual execution of judgment according to chapter 17:16. The horns, or kingdoms connected with the beast, have destroyed her. The kings mourn over her; so do those that have sought profit and ease and commerce in the earth. The royal and commercial system is shattered to pieces by the upset of the system. What characterises her, that for which she is judged, is idolatry, corruption, worldliness, and persecution. She is judged and destroyed, and the prosperity of the worldly is smitten by her fall, and the hopes of the kings who had commerce with her. The blood of all saints was found in her, as in Jerusalem in her day. Persecution comes from religion connected with worldly advantage. But what a picture we have here of the world, the relations of the kings and of the saints to Babylon!

**CHAPTER 19:2** clearly shows the aspect in which she is judged — the great whore who corrupted; and God avenges the blood of His servants. This judgment of Rome is the great joy of heaven. Hallelujah and salvation are sung. The elders and four living creatures fall down and worship, and the voice of the multitude proclaims the bringing in of the marriage of the Lamb, when the false woman is set aside. Till then, though espoused, the assembly was not thus actually united in the heavenly marriage of the Lamb. Still there was no greater event could be than a judgment of Rome. No doubt the beast had to be destroyed. Power, when God gave it scope, would soon do that. But here the old corruptress and persecutor was set aside for ever. Heaven is full of joy. There is no celebration of joy like this in the Revelation.

The rest of the book is simple and clear enough, for the mystery of God is closed. I do not myself attach any importance to the distinction, as a class, of those called to partake of the joy of that day. It means, I believe, just that, according to the parable of the marriage of the king's son, the guests are those who have share in the marriage joy. But several points have to be noticed: God in power has come in to set up His reign.

The true though not yet the open seat of the power of evil has been judged and destroyed. Two characters of evil, falsehood or deceitful corruption and violence, have existed since Satan himself began his career; false in himself, he was a murderer to others. The mystery of iniquity contained both, though hiding the latter and using others for it. Still she was

characterised by corruption and what was false Direct violence was in the hands of the beast. The destruction of that would, no doubt, relieve the earth of oppression; but for heaven and all that was heavenly-minded, the destruction of this Christ-dishonoring, soul-enslaving, and soul-debasing corruption, was joy and gladness, and the witness that divine power had come in. It had set aside the worst evil, the corrupting what was God's under pretense of being what Christ had purchased for Himself, the one precious object of His especial love. They sing, "Hallelujah! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!"

This was to make way for the introduction of what was His own — the manifest power of His Christ. But, before that, the assembly must have her place of association with Him in that — must have Himself: the marriage of the Lamb is come. Till the evil woman had been set aside, this could not be. This is the character of heavenly joy and redemption by which we are brought into it. Man on earth is first good, then yielding to temptation. Redemption supposes first evil, and even slavery to it, but then deliverance from it and our being set beyond it, God having taken to Him His power. The assembly is presented to Christ without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, cleansed and white, suited to Christ. The apostle was disposed, in sight of all this blessedness, to fall down and worship him who had revealed it. His mind was thrown into devotion by these scenes. Its immediate object was the heavenly messenger, and he turns to bow to him, but is forbidden. He was a fellow-servant, and the same to all who had the testimony of Jesus; for the spirit of prophecy, we are told, is the testimony of Jesus. The testimony not to worship intermediate beings is the last warning left to a declining assembly, as, so to speak, one of the first (in Colossians).

We now arrive at the great announcement of the coming of Christ in power. Heaven, which had been opened on Jesus and to Stephen, now opens for Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. Holy and true He had been known by faith, and the faithful and true Witness. The last He is now; not as witness, but in judgment, save as judgment itself is the witness of His faithfulness and truth. The characters in which He appears are plain but all-important. It is first in general judgment but in the form of war, not what we may call sessional judgment, but overcoming power. Sessional judgment is in chapter 20 from verse 4. His eyes have the piercingness of

divine judgment. He had many crowns, witness of His various and universal dominion. But, though thus revealed as man, He had a glory none could penetrate into;\* of which He had the conscious power, but which was not revealed. He was the avenger — His garment was dipped in blood. All characterised Him, we may note here, according to that in which He is manifested by the judgment itself. It was the Revealer, the Word of God — His eternal character — what He was before creation; now making it good in judgment.

[\* So it was as to His Person and service. No one knew the Son but the Father. It was the secret of His rejection. He was that, and so necessarily such in the world. But the world under Satan's influence would not have that. In His humiliation His divine glory was maintained in the unsounded depths of His Person. Now He is revealed in glory; but there ever remained what none could search or penetrate into — His own Person and nature. His revealed name was the Word of God. As revealing God in grace or power so as to make Him known, we know Him. But His Person as Son always remains unsearchable. His name is written, so that we know it is unknowable — not unknown but unknowable. But He made good now the character and requirements of God in respect of men — what they ought to be with God, and what God was to them in their natural relationship, revealed in respect of their responsibility. Judgment refers to these, and to ourselves.]

The armies in heaven had not garments dipped in blood. They were triumphant; they followed Him in His triumph, pure and perfect, His chosen, called, and faithful ones. The vengeance of Idumea was not their part, though they share His victory over the beast. The vengeance in Edom had a more earthly character, and is connected more with Judah. The Assyrian is there (see Psa. 83), not the beast. The beast and the false prophet are destroyed by Him as coming from heaven. He smites the nations with the rod of His mouth, He rules them with a rod of iron: this the saints will have with Him (chap. 2:26, 27). He treads the wine-press too.\* This is the part that is more earthly, as Isaiah 63 shows. So He that sits on the cloud thrusts in His sickle on the earth. It was an angel who cast the grapes into the wine-press, and the winepress was trodden\*\* it is not said, as by one sitting on the cloud. The character of the judgment of the beast and the false prophet is heavenly: it is the Word of God, the Lord from heaven; the wine-press is earthly. He is publicly, officially, and intrinsically King of kings, and Lord of lords. The beast and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire: this was a present final judgment — the rest were judicially slain. The final judgment of these

deceived ones is not said to take place here. Satan is not yet cast into the lake of fire, but into the bottomless pit, where the legion of devils besought the Lord they might not be sent. He is bound there so as not to deceive the nations for a thousand years. There will be no seduction by Satan during the thousand years.

[\* This too He does alone; not that the saints may not be with Him as His cortege, so to speak, but the execution of judgment is His. In Isaiah it is only said that of the people none were with Him. In sessional judgment, judgment is given to them.]

[\*\* I have already stated that the harvest is discriminative judgment: there is wheat for the garner. The wine-press is vengeance, righteous vengeance.]

We now come, evil power having been set aside, to the exercise of judicial authority in peace; and this is conferred on the saints. The prophet does not merely see the thrones as set in Daniel 7, but sitters on them too. Besides all to whom judgment is given in general, two special classes are mentioned, because they might seem to be too late, or to have lost their part: those beheaded (after the assembly was gone, for it is the Revelation-period we have to do with) for the witness of Jesus, and those who had not worshipped the beast (compare chap. 6:9-11; 13:15). These, as well as previously departed saints, had their part in living and reigning with Christ a thousand years. But those who were not Christ's, the rest of the dead, did not live again till the thousand years were over.\* These were finally delivered from the second death. The first death they had undergone, the natural wages of sin, but in faithfulness; in the second death, the final judgment against sin, they would have no part. It could have no power over them. On the contrary, they had special relationship with God and Christ, they were priests of God and of Christ, and would reign with Him a thousand years. They also are priests and kings. Note how God and Christ are here united in one thought, as continually in the writings of John. Thus the beast and the false prophet are in the lake of fire, their armies slain, and Satan bound in the abyss, and the risen saints are priests of God and Christ, reigning with Christ a thousand years. The details and effects, mark, are not given here. The object is to give the place of the saints, and especially of the sufferers, during the time of this book. The rest come in as a general fact, there were sitters on thrones of judgment; but the faithful of the prophecy are specially mentioned.

[\* It may be noted here that, according to the true reading, the living and reigning is certainly resurrection. "The rest of the dead lived not until," etc.; so that it is clearly used here for resurrection, as the following words confirm: "This is the first resurrection."

When the thousand years are finished, Satan is let loose again. He comes up on the earth, but he never gets up to heaven again. But the nations are tested by his temptation. Not even having seen Christ and enjoyed the fruits of His glory — no mere means can secure the heart of man, if it is to be depended upon; and men fall, in number as the sand of the sea, into Satan's hands as soon as tempted; enjoying blessing, where unfaithfulness would have been present loss (perhaps cutting off) and there was nothing to tempt them, but unfaithful as soon as they are tempted, as soon as the heart is tried. It was the last and needed trial of man; needed because they could not have finally enjoyed God with natural hearts, and the natural heart had not been tested where present blessing was on the side of owning a present, visible, glorious Christ. The deceived multitude, not limited now to a third of the earth or a special prophetic district but taking in the breadth of the earth, went up against the camp of the saints, and surrounded it and the beloved city, Jerusalem. It is remarkable here, there is no special presence of Christ amongst them. They are left apparently to be surrounded by their enemies. The Lord has allowed all this testing separation of personal faithfulness. Had He appeared, of course these hostile crowds could not have come up, nor would the thorough trial of the heart have proved the faithfulness of the saints, who would not follow the seductions of Satan. They are pressed upon and surrounded by the enemy, but faithful. Once this separation and full testing had been accomplished, God's judgment fell on them from heaven, and destroyed them. The devil was then cast into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet were already, where they are tormented for ever and ever.

This closed the exercise of wrath, of the destruction of hostile power — a wondrous scene — that God should have enemies in this world! Now judicial power, as such, seated in its own right, comes in. It may be remarked, that the exercise of this on the quick, forms no part of the contents of this book. The hostile power of the beast was destroyed by Him who judges and makes war, the heavenly saints having been taken to glory. The crowds of apostates at the end of the thousand years are destroyed by fire from heaven. But the judgment of Matthew 25 is not

found here, unless there be a possible connection with the judgment of chapter 20:4.

There now comes the judgment of the dead. There is no coming here. A great white throne is set; judgment is carried on according to the purity of God's nature. It was no dealing with the earth, or the power of evil, but with souls. Heaven and earth — all mere scenes of judgment — disappear. The secrets of men's hearts are judged by Him who knows them all. Heaven and earth flee away before the face of Him that sat on the throne, and the dead, small and great, stand before the throne. Judgment was according to works, as it was written in the books of record. Still another element was brought into view. Sovereign grace alone had saved according to the purpose of God.\* There was a book of life. Whosoever was not written there was cast into the lake of fire. But it was the finally closing and separating scene for the whole race of men and this world. And though they were judged every man according to his works, yet sovereign grace only had delivered any; and whoever was not found in grace's book was cast into the lake of fire. The sea gave up the dead in it; death and hades, the dead in them. And death and hades were put an end to for ever by the divine judgment. The heaven and earth passed away, but they were to be revived; but death and hades never. There was for them only divine destruction and judgment. They are looked at as the power of Satan. He has the power of death and the gates of hades; and hence these are for ever destroyed judicially. They will never have power again. They are personified; but of course there is no question of tormenting them or of punishment: when the devil himself is cast in, there is. But death was not then destroyed; for the wicked dead had not been raised for judgment. Now they had; and the last enemy is destroyed. The force of the image, I doubt not, is that all the dead now judged (the whole contents of hades, in whom the power of death had been) were cast into the lake of fire, so that death and hades, which had no existence but in their state, were entirely and judicially ended by their being cast in. The saints had long before passed out of them; but they subsisted in the wicked. Now these were, consequent on the judgment of the white throne, cast into the lake of fire — the second death. The limit and measure of escape was the book of life.

[\* Thus purpose and man's responsibility are never confounded, but, from the two trees of the garden on, are in juxtaposition; life brought into connection with responsibility in the law, responsibility being put first, and thus proof

given that man cannot stand before God; but the question is solved only in Christ, who bore our sins, died for us to sin, and is life. Counsels and promise of life in Christ come first, then responsibility in the creature on earth, then grace making good counsels, in righteousness, through the cross.]

But there was a new heaven and a new earth; but no more sea — no separation, nor part of the world not brought into an ordered earth before God. Here we do not find any mediatorial kingdom. The Lamb is not in the scene. God is all in all. No sorrow or crying more, no earthly people of God distinct from the inhabitants of the earth. These are God's people, and God is with them Himself, but withal His tabernacle is with them. This is the holy city, the New Jerusalem. The assembly has her own character, is the habitation of God in a special way, when the unchanging state comes, and all is made new. God is the end, as the beginning. Him that is athirst now God will refresh with the fountain of the water of life — the overcomer shall inherit all things. The world for the Christian is now a great Rephidim. This is the twofold portion of the final blessedness: he shall have God for his God, and be His son. Those who feared this path — did not overcome the world and Satan but had walked in iniquity — would have their part in the lake of fire. This closes the history of God's ways.

What follows is the description of the heavenly city, as before we had that of Babylon. Its heavenly character and millennial connection with the earth is revealed. One of the seven angels, as in the case of Babylon, comes to show the prophet the bride, the Lamb's wife. The result of judgment on the earth is the introduction of better and higher blessings. The prophet is taken, like Moses, to see the scene of promise, and sees New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God. This was its double character from God, divine in its origin, and also heavenly (compare 2 Corinthians 5:1). It might be of God and earthly. It might be heavenly and angelic. It was neither: it was divine in origin and heavenly in nature and character. It was clothed with divine glory: it must be as founded on Christ's work. It was transparent jasper; jasper being used as a symbol of divine glory (chap. 4:3). It is secure, having a wall great and high. It has twelve gates. Angels are become the willing doorkeepers of the great city, the fruit of Christ's redemption-work in glory. This marked the possession too, by man thus brought in the assembly to glory, of the highest place in the creation, and providential order of God, of which angels had previously been the



administrators. The twelve gates are full of human perfectness of governmental administrative power. The gate was the place of judgment. Twelve, we have often seen, denotes perfection and governmental power. The character of it is noted by the names of the twelve tribes. God had so governed these. They were not the foundation; but this character of power was found there. There were twelve foundations, but these were the twelve apostles of the Lamb. They were, in their work, the foundation of the heavenly city. Thus the creative and providential display of power, the governmental (Jehovah), and the assembly once founded at Jerusalem, are all brought together in the heavenly city, the organised seat of heavenly power. It is not presented as the bride, though it be the bride, the Lamb's wife. It is not in the Pauline character of nearness of blessing to Christ. It is the assembly as founded at Jerusalem under the twelve — the organised seat of heavenly power, the new and now heavenly capital of God's government. They had suffered and served the Lamb in the earthly, and under Him founded the heavenly. It is alike vast and perfect, and all measured and owned of God. It is not now a remnant measured; it is the city. It has not divine perfectness (that could not be), but it has divinely given perfectness. It is a cube, equal on every side, finite perfection. So the wall (they are merely symbols) was perfect, 12 x 12. The wall which secured it was the divine glory. As it is written of the earthly Jerusalem, "Salvation hath God appointed for walls and bulwarks."

The city was formed, in its nature, in divine righteousness and holiness — gold transparent as glass. That which was now by the word wrought in and applied to men below, was the very nature of the whole place (compare Ephesians 4:24). The precious stones, or varied display of God's nature, who is light, in connection with the creature (seen in creation, Ezekiel 28; in grace in the high priest's breast-plate), now shone in permanent glory, and adorned the foundations of the city. The gates had the moral beauty, which attracted Christ in the assembly and in a glorious way. That on which men walked, instead of bringing danger of defilement, was itself righteous and holy; the streets, all that men came in contact with, were righteousness and holiness — gold transparent as glass.

There was no concealment of God's glory in that which awed by its display no temple where men approached but where they could not draw nigh, where God was hidden. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb were

its temple. They were approached in their own nature and glory, surrounded only by that fully displayed.

Nor was there need of created light here; the glory of the divine nature lighted all, and the Lamb was the light-bearer in it.

Note here, we have not the Father as the temple. It is the revealed dispensational Ruler, the true God, and the Lamb who has made good His glory. This was the character of the city.

The vision goes on to show its relationship to those on the earth, and its inhabitants: a seeming inconsistency, but no real one; for the city is viewed as the estate of the bride. Where the inhabitants are spoken of, it is the individual blessing. The nations, spared in the judgments on earth, walk in the light of it; the world does, in a measure, in that of the assembly now. Then the glory will be perfect. The city enjoys the direct light within; the world transmitted light of glory. To it the kings of the earth bring their honor and glory. They own the heavens and the heavenly kingdom to be the source of all, and bring there the homage of their power. Night, there is not there, and its gates are ever open; no defence against evil is needed, though divine security leaves no approach to evil. The kings themselves bring their willing homage to it. But the glory and honor of the Gentiles is brought to it too. Heaven is seen as the source of all the glory and honor of this world. Hence these are now true. Nothing defiling enters there, nor what introduces idols and falsehood. Neither man's evil nor Satan's deceit can exist or produce any corruption there. How often, when anything good is set up now, the considerate heart knows that evil will enter, and Satan deceive and corrupt! There we have the certainty that this can never be. It was not merely the absence of evil, but the impossibility of its entrance, which characterised the holy city. There was that which, having its source in perfect grace, involves all blessed affections in connection with the Lamb in those within the city. Those only whose names were in the Lamb's book of life found place in the city.

The connection of the holy city with the earth, though not on it, is everywhere seen. The river of God refreshed the city, and the tree of life, whose fruits ever ripe were food for the celestial inhabitants of it, bore in its leaves healing for the nations. Only the glorified ever ate the fruit of constant growth; but what was manifested and displayed without, as the

leaves of a tree, was blessing to those on earth. We see grace characterising the assembly in glory. The nation and kingdom that will not serve the earthly Jerusalem shall utterly perish — it preserves its earthly royal character; the assembly its own: the leaves of the tree it feeds on are for healing. There is no more curse. The throne of God and the Lamb is in it. This is the source of blessing, not of curse; and His servants serve Him; often they cannot as they would here. Note too again here, how God and the Lamb are spoken of as one, as constantly in John's writings. His servants shall have the fullest privilege of His constant presence, shall see His face, and their belonging to Him as His own be evident to all. There is no night there, nor need of light, for the Lord God gives it; and, as to their state, they reign, not for the thousand years, as they do over the earth, but for ever and ever.

This closes the description of the heavenly city and the whole prophetic volume. What follows consists of warning, or the final expression of the thoughts of, and relationship with, Christ of the assembly.

The angel declares the truth of these things, and that the Lord God of the prophets — not as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, nor as directly teaching the assembly as dwelling in it by the Spirit — the Lord God of the prophets has sent His angel to inform His servants of these events. “Behold,” says Christ, speaking as of old, in the prophetic spirit, rising up to His now personal testimony, “Behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he who keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.” The assembly is viewed, not as the subject of prophecy, but as “the things that are,” time not being counted, specially time to come. Those that keep it are those concerned in the book, who are warned that Christ will soon be there. No doubt we all can profit by it, but we are not in the scenes it speaks of. John, impressed with the dignity of the messenger, fell down and would have worshipped him. But the saints of the assembly, even if made prophets of, were not to return into the uncertainty of ancient days. The angel was a simple angel, John's fellow-servant, and fellow-servant of his brethren the prophets: he was to worship God. Nor were the sayings to be sealed, as with Daniel: the time was at hand. When it closed its testimony, men would remain in the same state for judgment or blessing. And Christ would quickly come, and every man receive as his work was. Verse 7 was a warning, in form of blessing, to those in the circumstances

referred to, to keep the sayings of the book, but this verse 12 is the record of Christ's coming to the general judgment of the quick.

Finally, Christ announces Himself, having taken up the word in Person in verse 12, as Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end — God before and after all; and filling duration. I suppose we are to take as the true reading: "Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." The redeemed, cleansed ones, can enter there and feed on the tree of life; for I suppose it is the fruit here. Without are the unclean and violent, and those who love satanic falsehood and idolatry, sin against purity, against their neighbor, against God, and follow Satan.

This closes the summing up. The Lord Jesus now reveals Himself in His own Person, speaking to John and the saints, and declares who He is, in what character He appears to say it to them. "I am the root and offspring of David" — the origin and heir of the temporal promises of Israel; but much more than that — He is the bright and morning Star. It is what He is before He appears, in both respects; only the former regards Israel born of the seed of David according to the flesh. But the Lord has taken another character. He has not yet arisen as the Sun of righteousness on this benighted globe; but, to faith, the dawn is there, and the assembly sees Him in the now far spent night as the morning Star, knows Him, while watching according to His own word, in His bright heavenly character — a character which does not wake a sleeping world, but is the delight and joy of those who watch. When the sun arises, He will not be thus known: the earth will never so know Him, bright as the day may be. When Christ is in this place, the Spirit dwells in the assembly below, and the assembly has its own relationship. It is the bride of Christ, and her desire is toward Him.

Thus "the Spirit and the bride say, Come." It is not a warning from one coming as a judge and a rewarder, but the revelation of Himself which awakens the desire of the bride according to the relationship in which grace has set her. Nor is it a mere sentiment or wish: the Spirit who dwells in the assembly leads and suggests her thought. But the Spirit turns also, and the heart of him who enjoys the relationship, to others. "Let him that heareth" — let him who hears the voice of the Spirit in the assembly — join in the cry, and say, Come. It is one common hope, it should be our common

desire; and the sense of what is coming on the earth, and the sense of failure in things that are, ought only, though it be in truth an inferior motive, to urge the cry in all. But while still here, the saint has another place also. Not only do his desires go after God upwards and the heavenly Bridegroom, but he reflects God's known character, by having His nature and Spirit as manifested also in Christ's love, and in possession of the living water, though not of the Bridegroom. He turns round and invites others, "Let him that is athirst come," and proclaims it forth then to the world, "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." Thus the whole place of the heavenly saint, conscious of the assembly's place, is brought out in this verse, from his desire of Christ's coming, to his call to whosoever will to come.

The integrity of the book is preserved by a solemn warning of the danger of losing a part in the tree of life\* and the holy city. Christ then cheers the saint's heart, by assuring that He would quickly come; and the heart of the true saint responds with unfeigned and earnest desire, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." And then, with the salutation of grace, the book closes, leaving the promise and the desire as the last words of Jesus on the heart.

[\* The true reading here is "tree," not "book"; but the book of life is not life, nor is our being written there final, though a *prima facie* register, unless indeed written there before the foundation of the world: but, even so, it is not the same thing as the possession of life.]

Let the reader note here that, in the beginning and end of the book, before and after the prophetic statements, we have in a beautiful way the conscious position of the saints.

The first, at the opening of the whole book, gives the individual conscious blessing through what Christ has done; the latter, the whole position of the assembly, thus distinguishing clearly the saints under the gospel from those whose circumstances are prophetically made known to them in this book. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us kings and priests to God and his Father." As soon as Christ is named (and it is so in both cases), it awakens in the saints the consciousness of Christ's love and their own place in relationship with Him. They are already washed from their sins in His own blood, and made kings and priests to God and His Father — have their place and state fixed, before any of the prophetic part is developed, and in the coming kingdom

will enjoy that place, not of being blessed under Christ, but of being associated with Him. Here they have their place simply in the kingdom and priesthood; it is individual title resulting from His first coming. They are loved, washed in His own blood, and associated with Him in the kingdom.

At the end of the book, Christ is revealed as the morning Star, a place forming no part of the prophecy, but that in which the assembly, who has waited for Him, is associated with Him for herself, and the kingdom (compare the promise to the overcomers in Thyatira).<sup>\*</sup> This draws out active love (not as before, simply being loved and what we are made) love first directed towards Christ in the assembly's known relation to Himself, then to the saints who hear, then to the thirsty, then to all the world. The desire of the assembly, as the bride with whom the Spirit is, is directed to Christ's second coming for herself — to the possessing the morning Star; then the Spirit turns to the saints, calling on them to say to Jesus, Come — to join in this desire. But we have the Spirit though not the Bridegroom; hence whoever is athirst is called on to come and drink, and thus the gospel proclaimed abroad, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." It is love acting in the saint all round from Christ to sinners in the world.

[\* Compare the place of the bright cloud in Luke 9. There it is the Father's voice.]



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